Between the Worlds

Scandinavian Otherworld Journeys

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Jens Peter Schjødt

Journeys to Other Worlds in pre-Christian Scandinavian Mythology: Different Worlds – Different Purposes

Abstract: The aim of this article is to argue for a certain kind of 'system' in various 'Other World' journeys in Scandinavian mythology after having stated that 'journey' is one of the chief metaphors for communication between different worlds that we meet in mythologies all over. It is the purpose here to show that there are different kinds of journeys in this mythology. Thus, there are different destinations, different protagonists who are travelling, and different purposes for the travel. In focusing on the two cosmological axes, the horizontal and the vertical, it is proposed that journeys along the horizontal axis are most often going to giant land, that the protagonist is Þórr, and that the purpose is the killing of hostile beings, i.e. the giants. On the vertical axis, on the other hand, the destination is the underworld, the protagonist is Óðinn, and the purpose is the acquisition of numinous powers. Thus, there seems to be a clear systematization when it comes to destination, protagonist and purpose, although, as is also stated, there are no rules without exception, especially when it comes to world views in orally transmitted religions.

1 Introduction

This article will aim at discussing 'Other World journeys' in Scandinavian mythology, starting from the hypothesis that there are some stable relations between certain aspects that can be found in all journeys, which differ, however, widely from one individual journey to the next concerning *who* is travelling, to *where* do they travel, and *which* purpose do they have. We can immediately state that a journey is when someone moves from one place to another, almost always with a certain purpose. Journeys are, naturally, carried out in the real world, but they are also one of the favourite themes within many different narrative genres, sometimes describing real-world journeys, sometimes deliberately taking on a symbolic value. Within the history of religions, travels can be observed very often, not only in narrative contexts but also frequently in ritual contexts, most often as a means of communicating between 'This' and the 'Other World'. Thus, for instance, shamans are more or less defined by their travelling abilities. They leave the world of humans for a certain purpose and approach that of the spirits in order to manipulate some condition in the human

world with help from the spirits. I have argued earlier[1] that this relation between This World on the one hand and one or several Other Worlds on the other hand, and the communication between them constitutes the very prerequisite for speaking about religion at all. And, of course, not only shamans travel to Other Worlds, but all sorts of religious specialists and even some ordinary persons can be seen to have this ability at special occasions, for instance in ritual settings, generating some sort of ecstatic psychic condition. Travelling, however, is not the only way to communicate with the Other World: humans may send gifts in the form of sacrifice, or prayers may be the object which mediates between the worlds. Another way of manipulating the 'normal' course of events is by using 'magic', which is seen by some as distinct from religion, whereas others would view it as just another technique within the realm of religion. But journeys remain one of the important metaphors when contact between worlds is at stake, no doubt because the difference between humans and gods is most often expressed as a difference in space: gods live at another place than humans do, and contact will thus often involve actors from one of the worlds travelling to the other. In short, journeys between This World and the Other World can be seen as one of the very basic elements in all religions, although journeys may have very different roles and purposes in various religions, or in different types of religion.[2] This can be illustrated as in the following figure:

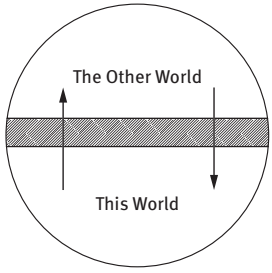

Fig. 1

Thus, from a human religious perspective, there is an Other World that has some characteristics, some of them universal and some culturally determined, which are seen as completely different from the characteristics of the one in which we are living here and now. "Completely different", however, should not be taken too literally, since, in order to make itself relevant, it must also have common features with the world in

1 E.g. Schjødt 2008, pp. 17 ff.

2 For instance, they are much more prominent in the so-called Primary Religions than is usually the case in Secondary Religions, to use the terminology of Jan Assmann (2006).

which humans are living. Thus, the beings inhabiting the Other World will most often look somewhat human, but with differences in perhaps size, colour, and physical peculiarities of all sorts;[3] they will have some counterintuitive characteristics, to use a notion from Pascal Boyer.[4] In most cultures this 'Other World', however, is in reality not only one but several 'Other Worlds' with varying degrees of 'otherness'. Some may be behind the stars, whereas others can be inside the nearby mountain. Just to mention a few, we often see a world of the gods, a world of the demons, a world of the dead, and worlds inhabited by various groups of other supernatural beings. These worlds will typically have some loose relation to each other, thematized in mythical narratives, but are thought of and relevant in different social situations. I shall return to some of these Other Worlds in a moment.

In dealing with the religions of pre-Christian Scandinavia, the situation is no different. We have examples of what we may call supernatural journeys in connection with the so-called *seiðr*-rituals, although a clear characterization of the destination as an Other World is not frequent and often remains implicit in ritual descriptions. In narrative sources such as myths and pseudo-historical narratives, we often meet some hero going to a world that is different and in some way opposite to the one in which his ordinary life plays out. Even though the mythology proper (the Eddas) as we know it from the North shows a remarkable absence of human beings in comparison to most other mythologies, there are a few instances of humans going from This World to the Other (Þjálfi). Other narrative genres, most notably the *fornaldarsögur* and Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, have a huge amount of such descriptions in which a person (almost always a male) goes to various kinds of Other Worlds, although very seldom to the world of the gods (which is quite intriguing, since that is what we often see in other mythologies) but rather to some kind of wilderness, where they meet various kinds of more or less anonymous supernatural beings. Furthermore, at least one god, namely Óðinn, frequently takes part in human affairs and travels to the world of humans,

3 The opposition between This and the Other World has, with good reason, played an immense role within the History of Religions, since it is somewhat overlapping (but certainly not identical with) the profane – sacred opposition which has been constitutive for such different scholars as Émile Durkheim and Mircea Eliade and many others, emphasizing different aspects of that opposition. Perhaps the most famous of the scholars that have been dealing with 'the Other' is the German theologian and historian of religion, Rudolf Otto, who in his book *Das Heilige* (1917) attempted to describe the experience of the 'wholly Other' (*das ganz Andere*). Although the book is a classic and certainly makes many brilliant observations, there is no doubt that the conception of the Other is, to a large extent, based on Christian ideas, projected onto religion in general. Within the Old Norse field, Kevin J. Wanner (2007) has been dealing with what he characterizes as a "Platonic-Augustinian" opposition between "spiritual" and "terrestrial modes of existence", arguing that Óðinn does not fit in with this opposition (p. 350). In using the terms 'spiritual' and 'terrestrial', Wanner is probably right; however, speaking about 'This' and the 'Other World', Óðinn, as we shall see below, is a perfect example of a mythic figure oscillating between these two entities.

4 Boyer 2001, p. 65 *et passim*.

emphasizing the necessity for communication between the worlds. All this is highly interesting but not the main focus of this article. What I am going to deal with here are the journeys between the individual Other Worlds, when beings from one Other World travel to another.

Thus, to summarize what has briefly been said so far: The very foundation of any religion is the collective knowledge that there is at least one but often many worlds that are different from, and in some respects opposite to, the one in which people live their everyday life. Between This World and the Other, a communication takes place, maintained by so-called religious specialists in particular, and this communication is often expressed as some kind of journey, where the 'shaman' leaves This World, travels to the Other and returns again, bringing with him some sort of information from the Other World, often suggesting a solution to a crisis. However, since we often find more than one Other World within the religious world view usually expressed in myths and mythology, figures from one Other World can also travel to other Other Worlds, and this is what we frequently see in Old Norse mythology as it is related in the Eddas.

What I am going to deal with here are, as mentioned in the beginning, the structural relations between some important aspects of the phenomenon of the mythic 'journey', namely 1) the characteristics of the places involved (that from which the protagonists start out and that of the destination); 2) the identity of the protagonist who is travelling; and 3) the purpose of the journey. Before beginning this exposition, however, it is important to state that in dealing with myths and religion in general, we must always reckon with inconsistencies, i.e. that there is no such thing as a unified cosmology with stable and systematic relations between its individual parts. Instead, we rather ought to understand the mythology as several discourses that could be loosely connected but are basically used in various social situations (for instance in connection with rituals, in explaining some sort of disaster, in socially sanctioned traditions, or simply for entertainment). That indicates that what we may hope to observe are some *tendencies*. In religions and mythologies such as that of ancient Scandinavia, there was no dogma and hardly any theological discourse.[5] Therefore, the semantic space covered by the individual gods should not be expected to have watertight borders towards semantic spaces covered by other gods; a certain amount of overlap is the rule rather than the exception. Nevertheless, as I have argued in earlier articles,[6] it seems possible to find what I have called 'semantic centers' that we may apply to the individual gods, for instance physicality in connection with Þórr, intellectual abilities in connection with Óðinn, and sexuality in connection with Freyr. Since such centers will inevitably characterize the narrative contexts and the mythological roles

5 Although such a theological discourse can be seen in most of the big contemporary religions, it is certainly a phenomenon that is characteristic of the so-called 'axial religions', but it does not belong to the religions of a more archaic stage (cf. Bellah 2011, pp. 275–282).

6 E.g. Schjødt 2012a; Schjødt 2013.

of these beings, it will therefore also be possible to find some tendencies in the way the gods are depicted throughout the mythology. Of course, the semantic center of each individual god will not be paramount every time his or her name is mentioned, partly because the functions of the various gods may overlap; but, analytically, these centers are not difficult to find.[7]

Before we can turn to the journeys between the worlds, it will first be necessary to take a look at the cosmology as it can be deduced from the sources – again, more in the form of tendencies than as 100% consistent – in order to position the most important worlds, judged from the extant mythological sources.

2 Various kinds of Other Worlds in Old Norse Mythology

As has been proposed by several scholars, such as Aron Ya. Gurevich, Eleazar Meletinskij, Kirsten Hastrup, Margaret Clunies Ross, and myself,[8] it is possible to depict two 'axes' in the Old Norse cosmology, namely a vertical and a horizontal one, the vertical axis mediating between the upper world and the underworld, whereas the horizontal axis mediates between center and periphery. If, as will be argued, these axes depict, on the one hand, a representation of 'This World' and, on the other hand, some 'Other World', it indicates logically that there must be at least two Other Worlds, namely one on each axis. Especially in earlier research, there have been many proposals as to how the Old Norse cosmology could be figured,[9] most of them taking as a prerequisite that in pre-Christian Scandinavia, there existed a coherent world view that can be outlined from the mythological information available in *Snorra Edda* and the Eddic poems. Most of these proposals did not take into consideration the character of the culture and religion in pre-Christian times, one of the main characteristics of which was that it was very diversified: geographically, socially, and cognitively,[10] at least in many details; this means that different people did not hold exactly the same world views and that the sources probably reflect this diversity. But in spite of all these diversities, there seem to be some clear tendencies structured in accordance with the axes just mentioned. This can be expressed as in figure 2.

Now, this is certainly not to say that in pre-Christian Scandinavia there only existed two Other Worlds. Most likely, there were several worlds, both along the horizontal axis and the vertical axis. For instance, on the vertical axis it seems that the

7 Cf. Schjødt 2012b.

8 Gurevich 1969; Meletinskij 1973; Hastrup 1981; Clunies Ross 1994; Schjødt 1990.

9 See for instance Steinsland 2005, p. 103 and Branston 1980, pp. 73–4, referring to some older depictions.

10 Cf. Schjødt 2009.

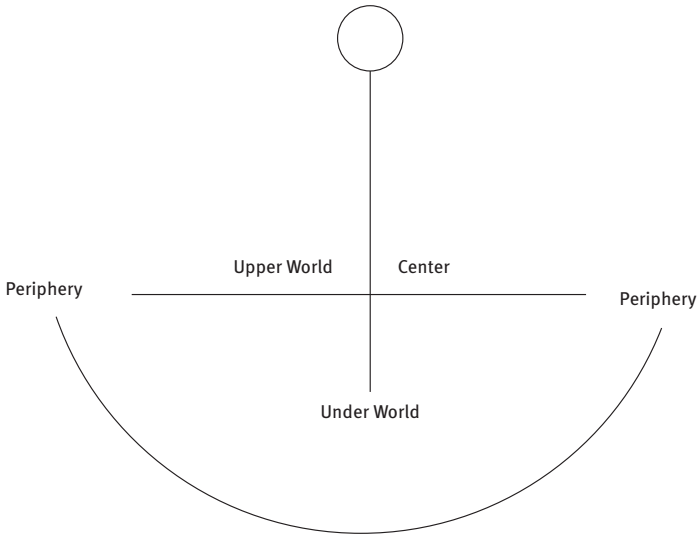

Fig. 2

underworld can be divided into a world of the dead, a world of the dwarfs, and worlds containing all sorts of fertility powers. And, in accordance with this, along the horizontal axis there seem to be worlds of different kinds of giants, different kinds of monsters and so forth. Not least because of the diversity just mentioned, we can hardly hope to be able to systematize all these worlds and the relations between them in detail. The point, however, is that, in order to classify these worlds as Other Worlds, it is necessary that we also have the presentation of a 'This World', and since the Other Worlds are situated in the periphery in the horizontal model, and in the underworld in the vertical model, it follows that the representation of This World should be sought in the upper world and in the center. This, of course, is where the humans are situated. But, as mentioned, there are very few humans that are part of the mythic narratives in the traditional mythic sources. There is another group of beings, however, that are situated there, namely the Æsir, one of the two main groups of gods in the Nordic pantheon, the other one being the Vanir, or – since it has been suggested in recent years that this group did not exist in pagan times[11] – a family consisting of three gods, namely Njǫrðr, Freyr, and Freyja, not family-related to the Æsir. Although Snorri often maintains that the Æsir live somewhere in the sky, or in the treetop of Yggdrasill,[12] it

11 Simek 2010. For criticisms of this theory, see Tolley 2011; Schjødt 2014; Gunnell 2017.

12 For instance in *Gylfaginning*, ch. 15, 22. According to Gísli Sigurðsson, Snorri tells us 82 times that the gods should be looked for in the sky (2014, p. 184).

appears both from other parts of Snorri's work and from the Eddic poems that they should rather be seen as living in the middle of the world, at the foot of Yggdrasill.[13] This indicates that they should be seen as living in the upper world on the vertical axis, and in the center on the horizontal axis.

I have earlier discussed the relationship between the two families of gods, Æsir and Vanir,[14] and here I shall give a brief summary of the conclusions reached: The discussion between the historicists on the one hand and the structuralists on the other seems to have been concluded with the victory of the structuralists.[15] The relation between the two groups is not only systematic with regard to their social affiliation, as was proposed by Georges Dumézil more than half a century ago, but also with regard to their cosmological position, the Æsir living in the upper world, whereas the Vanir – although never expressed directly – appear to have belonged to the underworld, not least because they are functionally attached to death and fertility. The Æsir are clearly attached to what is seen as typically male activities, to killing and war, whereas the Vanir are primarily characterized as peaceful and strongly connected to sexuality and fertility. As has been proposed by Terry Gunnell,[16] they may even be seen as representatives of different times of the year, which was probably divided into a 'male period' and a 'female period', supporting the notion that there is also a semantic opposition relating to gender. Most important, perhaps, is a piece of information given in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 4, where it is said that it was customary that among the Vanir, marriages were of an incestuous kind, whereas this practice was forbidden among the Æsir. This indicates that the norms of the Vanir were of another kind than those of the Æsir and that those of the Æsir were in accordance with the norms of the society in which all these gods were venerated.[17] More oppositions of this kind can be named, but the idea here is that the Vanir, together with other groups and in relation to the Æsir, should be seen as representatives of an Other World, whereas the Æsir, in accordance with this, are to be seen as representatives of a kind of 'This World'. In other words, we could say that the Æsir are mythological representatives of an 'in-group', whereas the Vanir can be seen as representatives of an 'out-group'. These groups are thus related as 'we' in opposition to 'they'. Another trait worth noticing is the connection of the Vanir to magic, primarily expressed in the statement by Snorri, in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 4, that Freyja knew the *seiðr* before she came to the Æsir and taught it to them. And *seiðr*, like other kinds of magic,

13 Cf. Schjødt 1990.

14 Schjødt 1991; Schjødt 2008.

15 The idea that the two divine groups should be representatives of two different cultures can, however, still be seen from time to time (see Schjødt 2014, pp. 25–30).

16 Gunnell 2000, p. 138; cf. Gunnell 2006.

17 It is also conspicuous that when the male hostages from the Vanir, Njǫrðr and Freyr, marry after the exchange, they marry women from the giant world. To deal with that in any detail, however, will take us too far from the subject of this article (see Clunies Ross 1994, pp. 93–102; Schjødt 2008, pp. 382–396).

surely belongs to the Other World, which is where it has to be acquired, although certain skilled individuals of the in-group may learn and practice it.

If all this is true, the structure here can be seen as a dislocation from the relation between humans and supernatural beings to a parallel one, dealing with the relation between Æsir and certain other supernatural groups (i.e. underworld beings and giants). These supernatural groups are thus 'Other' in a double sense: they are 'Other' from the human perspective, but they are also 'Other' from the perspective of the Æsir, who therefore come to constitute a human representation. It must be emphasized that the Æsir are certainly different from, and in certain respects a kind of opposite to humans, for instance when it comes to ritual relations. It is therefore important to distinguish between ritual and mythic aspects of the religious world view: at the ritual level, the Æsir certainly represent an Other World, whereas on the mythic level they represent a This World. What is aimed at here is the structural similarity in relation to 'others', but it is also worth noticing that in the cosmological setting constituted by Yggdrasill, humans and gods apparently were interchangeable, since in *Grímnismál* 31 we are told that humans live under one of the roots of the world tree, whereas in *Gylfaginning* ch. 15,[18] we are told that the Æsir live there.

So, on both the horizontal and the vertical axes, we have an 'in-group' consisting of the Æsir and, as suggested, humans by representation, as well as an 'out-group', mainly represented by the giants on the horizontal, and the Vanir and other chthonian groups on the vertical axis. This dislocation can be illustrated in the following way:

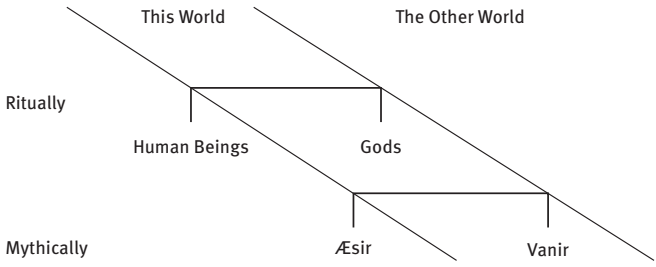

Fig. 3

This being said, it should also be stated that, as mentioned earlier, as soon as we leave the Eddas, we do find several humans going to some Other World, particularly in the *fornaldarsögur* and in Saxo's work. However, almost all these incidents take place in what may be termed legendary or semimythical settings. Famous examples are Hadingus

18 Faulkes (ed.) 2005.

in Saxo, going to the underworld, and Sigmundr in *Völsunga saga*, whose stay in the forests, partly together with his son Sinfjǫtli, can be seen as a journey to an Other World. But even in the Eddic poem *Hyndluljóð*, we can see the human king-to-be Óttarr, disguised as a boar, going to the underworld (this is how we must understand the rock cave with the dead seeress) and thus an Other World. It is noticeable that the protagonists in these narratives are not gods, but they are not ordinary human beings either. They thus exemplify another characteristic of these folk- or 'primary' religions (as they are called by Assmann),[19] namely that the borders between humans and gods are often blurred so that we do not know exactly into which category we should put certain individual figures. But, as mentioned, it is probably important that these individuals do not usually go to the world of the gods but to the underworld or some sort of wilderness. For lack of space, however, we shall in the following only deal with journeys carried out by the gods, in particular Óðinn and Þórr, although other gods too cross the borders between worlds.[20]

3 Different Worlds and their inhabitants, the protagonists, and the purposes of travelling

Let us deal more analytically with the elements mentioned earlier in order to investigate whether we can find some sort of structure in the journeys between these worlds. To begin with, we notice that the inhabitants of the Other Worlds situated on the two axes appear to be very different:

A. The horizontal axis

Starting with the horizontal axis, it seems as if the outer spaces of the world are inhabited first and foremost by the giants. This is clearly the impression we get from Snorri in *Gylfaginning* (in particular ch. 8) where it is said that the giants live in *Útgarðr* at the outskirts of the inhabited world. We must be aware, of course, that the term *Útgarðr* is only found in Snorri, which is one of the criticisms that could be raised against the analyses of Meletinskij and Hastrup.[21] Nevertheless, the descriptions of various habitations of giants indicate that they are living far from humans as well as gods, their habitations are characterized by cold temperatures and rocks and often located in mountainous areas north and east of the 'civilized' World, i.e. that of the Æsir;[22]

19 See above, note 2.

20 For instance Freyja in *Hyndluljóð*, Hermoðr in *Gylfaginning* (ch. 49) and Loki in *Skáldskaparmál* (ch. 35).

21 See above, note 8.

22 For reflections on 'the East' as a topos in the Eddic poems and in Snorri, we can refer to Rösli 2015, pp. 145–175.

particularly in relation to the journeys, we often get the impression that they are at a large distance from those of the Æsir. And since humans and gods are living closer to the center of the world, by the world tree, the *axis mundi*, it follows that going to the giants means leaving the world in which *we* live. We therefore have to look a bit closer at the giants. The way in which they are mostly presented in the sources could well indicate that they may be of different kinds, probably with different historical roots, and, accordingly, they are also mentioned by different names.[23] This means that a thorough discussion of the giants would be a project on its own, and I shall therefore deal only with some general characteristics. Furthermore, it is important to state that the analysis in the following deals with the myths and not with the religious world view in general. The giants were often seen as beings who were threatening in various ways, living in different places in the natural landscape surrounding the cultural settings in a kind of 'giant community', and much less frequently seen as part of some more or less well defined mythology. However, when religious notions are put in narrative form, such as myth, they must acquire some structural characteristic that can fit in with other religious notions present in the mythic universe.

Even if there seem to be at least two different categories of giants, namely those that are hostile and those that are wise – not that these characteristics are mutually exclusive – they always seem to be in some kind of opposition to the Æsir. Thus, in the journeys of Þórr (and his human counterparts in Saxo), when he is going for instance to Geirrǫdr, Hrungnir, Hymir, or Útgardaloki, it is obvious that they are seen as fierce enemies to the god, who kills them or at least wants to do so. Although the giants appear in many situations as beings of chaos, not least in the myths surrounding Ragnarǫk, i.e. as a threat against 'our' world, they are seldom presented as being completely without civilization: they live in halls, they have attractive daughters,[24] they have banquets, and so forth. They basically have the same norms and needs as the gods, i.e. security, women, desire for fame, power, and riches. They are therefore not characterized as uncivilized, but they clearly have another civilization which is different from that of the Æsir gods, and they are in general seen as more primitive. This is an important aspect, for even if the giants are hostile, they also possess something that is worth pursuing for the gods – mostly women but also riches,[25] magical knowledge, and fame gained by fighting them, as is clearly expressed in the bragging of Þórr in *Hárbarðsljóð*. In that sense, the giants often appear to be similar to enemies in the real world: they are threatening, they try to steal our women and our weapons etc., just as we try to steal theirs, and therefore we have to defend ourselves and eventually kill them, thereby earning the highest honour and reputation. Therefore,

23 For instance *jǫtunn*, *þurs*, *trǫll*, to mention just a few. We can refer the reader to Katja Schulz' very useful book *Riesen* from 2004, which discusses all the information related in the sources.

24 For instance, it is worth noticing that the male Vanir gods take their wives from the giant group.

25 For examples of the wealth of the giants, see Schulz 2004, pp. 83–4.

I will argue that many of the giants appear as representatives of the human 'others': they are like us, but then again not quite like us; they represent a culture which is different, which is 'other' in important ways; therefore it is natural that we have to defend our possessions, whereas it is quite legitimate that we try to steal theirs.[26] In other words: the giants, like foreign cultures, represent a danger as well as a potential resource.

Even though Þórr is frequently the main adversary of the giants, Freyr[27] and Óðinn too are sometimes seen in situations of conflict. However, Óðinns way of approaching them is quite different from Þórr's, and 'his' giants are not first and foremost characterized by physical strength but by their intellectual skills. The most famous confrontation between Óðinn and a giant is no doubt the plot we see in *Vafþrúðnismál*, where Óðinn has a knowledge competition with Vafþrúðnir, the wise giant. Whereas Þórr is usually physically superior to his adversaries, Óðinn turns out to be intellectually superior, but the hostility between the god and the giant is just as clear as in the Þórr myths. The important thing, however, is that the amount of incidents when Þórr confronts the giants is far bigger than that of any other god. Although we cannot rely on *argumenta ex silentio*, the tendency clearly seems to indicate that the main opponent of the giants is Þórr, the strong defender of *cosmos* in a literal sense: that is the right order, our order, which is constantly threatened by enemies from the periphery.

On the horizontal axis, the opposition should therefore be seen as primarily one between gods, most often Þórr, and giants. Obviously, Jǫrmungandr, the Miðgarðr serpent, also belongs to this axis, and other monsters such as Fenrir should probably be seen as belonging here, too, since there don't seem to be any chthonic qualities attached to it. The Miðgarðr serpent is certainly thematized as Þórr's main adversary, since he is confronting it not only once but twice.[28] So, although it is not a giant in the usual sense of the word, it is probably the main symbol of periphery in the whole of Old Norse cosmology and certainly situated on the horizontal axis. Fenrir, on the other hand, seems to be related rather to Óðinn and ends up killing him at Ragnarǫk, just to be killed himself by Viðarr immediately thereafter.

B. The vertical axis

The 'Other' is not just a hostile entity and may possess some valuables that 'we' need or would like to own. We have already seen this to be the case on the horizontal axis when women in particular but also other items are sought by the Æsir. We have seen

26 I thus disagree with Clunies Ross (1994) as she argues that the relationship between the various groups of supernatural beings reflects social tensions within the group. I am much more inclined to view the giants as a prototypical 'outgroup'.

27 In an otherwise unknown myth, he fights against the giant Beli.

28 See Meulengracht Sørensen 1986 for the available sources on the relation between Þórr and the Miðgarðr serpent.

that Óðinn makes contact with Vafþrúðnir, not in order to gain new knowledge, since it must be supposed that in a knowledge competition, the one who asks the questions already knows the answers, but rather to defeat him. But Óðinn does seek knowledge from giants – albeit always of the female sex – in order to learn more, something that is clearly not the case with Þórr. The classical cases are Óðinn's meetings with the *vǫlur* in *Baldrs draumar* and in *Vǫluspá*, in both of which Óðinn travels to some Other World that should most likely be seen as below, since it is the place of the dead.[29] But there are other instances, such as the Gunnlǫð myth (as related by Snorri), in which Óðinn approaches Gunnlǫð inside a mountain. In this way, there seems to be a tendency that Giant women have a role different from that of male giants: they can be seen as suppliers of numinous knowledge. Admittedly, this is not always their role, and particularly in the Þórr myths, the protagonist often fights giant women, but as we have just seen, these encounters always take place on the horizontal axis. This lack of consequence is probably due to the fact that giant women have a double character: On the one hand, they are semantically linked to the giant race, which, as we have just seen, is characterized as the hostile 'other', but on the other hand, their feminine character links them to the feminine as a semantic category, and this is not primarily hostile but, on the contrary, characterized as a supplier of numinous knowledge – and of course sexuality. Apart from these encounters with giant women, however, we also notice that Óðinn acquires knowledge from the chthonic world in the famous myth about the self-hanging in *Hávamál* 138–141 (he picks up the runes from below), although in this case the acquisition of knowledge is not thematized as a journey.

In my 2008 book, *Initiation between Two Worlds*, I have argued thoroughly that an underworld location is one of several characteristics of the numinous knowledge that plays such a big role not only in the Óðinn myths, but also in many narrative settings in which the protagonists are human beings, i.e. legendary heroes. The interesting part here is that these heroes are typically related to Óðinn as his 'chosen' men, indicating that they have been initiated to him. And, to return to the underworld, we can state that some of these heroes are actually going to the Underworld, stated most directly in the Hadingus myth by Saxo but also to be recognized in the long initiation sequence that Sigurðr undergoes before he is able to kill the dragon Fáfnir.[30] In the initiations of other heroes, such as Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli, however, the underworld scenario is clearly down-played, maybe because of the 'realistic' setting in the *fornaldarsögur* as compared to the mythic scenario of the Eddas. Also, if we imagine a ritual

29 In *Baldrs draumar*, it is quite clear that the *vǫlva* is dead, whereas there has been some discussion whether this is also the case in *Vǫluspá*. For instance, Judy Quinn (2002) has argued that this is not the case, while I myself have argued (Schjødt 2008, pp. 218–222) that, according to the semantic universe, she must belong to the underworld, and is thus most likely to be perceived as dead.
30 Schjødt 2008, pp. 282–298.

setting,[31] we should not expect any truly vertical movement. Whereas it is no problem to have the actors in myths travel to the underworld, in a ritual setting, the creation of an underworld scenario is more complicated, and 'earth houses', maybe caves of different kinds, and localities on the horizontal axis would probably often have to do. I shall not go any deeper into the ritual sphere, but it is worth noticing that when humans go to another world, it is mostly characterized along the same lines as the vertical Other World in the mythology: the Other World of the giants does not seem to have been ritualized, at least not to the same extent.[32]

The underworld scenario is also clearly seen in *Hyndluljóð*, where Freyja's human protégé, Óttarr, together with his mistress, goes to the giant woman Hyndla in order to acquire knowledge. Again, we notice that journeys to the underworld, although some sort of hostility may be present, are mainly a means for receiving some kind of information. This is all well in accordance with the idea that the main purposes of going downwards along the vertical axis is to gain numinous knowledge or numinous skills. In this way, the underworld beings are just as 'foreign' as the giants, but their 'foreignness' is certainly of another kind: although they may be dangerous, as are all figures who have special access to another world, they are not per definition hostile if they are treated according to certain rules.

To summarize this part, we can state the following: Along both of the two cosmological axes, we have an in-group and an out-group. In both cases the Æsir constitute the in-group, and they are to a certain extent isomorphous with the human in-group. On the horizontal axis, the opposition is constituted by the giants, who live in the periphery and are usually represented as something hostile and foreign. The opposition on this axis is therefore of a confrontational kind. On the vertical axis, the opposition is constituted by a huge and non-homogenous group, consisting of fertility beings, the dead, and other groups and individuals who live in the underworld and usually represent something that may contribute to a higher level of numinosity. The opposition on this axis is therefore of a complementary or supplementary kind. So, while the giants are primarily hostile, although they may contribute to the in-group with physical goods, the underworld beings are primarily knowledgeable, although they may be dangerous. The objects that can be gained from the giants are thus mainly material, whereas those from the underworld are mainly of a spiritual kind.

The two axes thus represent various aspects of otherness, at least as a clear tendency: on the one hand, the hostility towards 'us' and, on the other hand, the potential for 'us'.

31 Cf. Schjødt 2008, pp. 443–450.

32 However, we cannot rule out that some sort of 'ritual drama' may have taken place as has been proposed by many scholars from different perspectives (for instance Grønbech 1931; Stanley Martin 1972; Gunnell 1995), which could easily have involved presentations of giants.

4 Conclusions

The hypothesis presented in the beginning of this paper was that there is a certain, rather stable, relation between certain aspects of travelling, namely destination, protagonist, and purpose, when it comes to the basic structure of a 'journey' as this phenomenon is presented in the Old Norse mythological texts, primarily the Eddas. The results we have reached show, in my opinion, quite convincingly that such a pattern actually does exist. We have seen that there are different destinations for the various Other World journeys and that these destinations are characterized in quite different ways. Therefore, the purposes of going there differ too, since what we can get if we travel along the horizontal axis are physical objects, a warrior reputation, and great fame. Therefore, the main protagonist going on these journeys is Þórr, who is primarily known as a very physical figure with huge strength, which is why he is also the greatest of fighters in Ásgarðr. Going to the underworld, on the other hand, always has the purpose of gaining knowledge of a more 'spiritual' kind; here, the main protagonist is Óðinn or some of his human heroes who are related to him by descent or initiation. We can thus present the conclusion in the following figure:

	Horizontal	**Vertical**
Destination	Giant land	Underworld
Characteristics	Threats and hostility	Fertile Potential
Protagonist	Þórr	Óðinn
Purpose	Physical killing	Intellectual fertility

Fig. 4

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Flemming Kaul

The Possibilities for an Afterlife. Souls and Cosmology in the Nordic Bronze Age

Abstract: The rich iconographical material of the Nordic Bronze Age represented on bronze objects demonstrates a complex mythology related to the eternal voyage of the sun; on this voyage, the sun is supported by helper figures. Some motifs are related to the direction to the right; some motifs are related to the direction to the left. The direction to the right belongs to the daytime voyage of the sun, whereas the direction to the left is related to its nocturnal, underworld voyage. Among other elements, the interpretation proposed here must consider the meaning of the strokes found on many ship images. These strokes on the mythological ships represent the crew of the ships, which consists of the souls of the dead. A mutual dependency between the life-giving sun and the souls of human beings was created in Bronze Age mythology. By analyzing the images, it is argued that the souls were actively working, being paddlers of the divine sun-ship or sun-ships that every day and night traveled through all the spheres.

1 Introduction

It may seem to be an impossible task to search for evidence for unattainable matters, such as ideas related to an afterlife and to soul beliefs in the Nordic Bronze Age. We shall keep in mind that we possess no literary sources directly related to the Nordic Bronze Age that can inform us about what they thought happened after death. Thus, many researchers have avoided facing such topics. From the 1950s and onwards, until the 1990s, new theoretical approaches related to positivism and social sciences gained importance. Keywords such as structuralism, processional archaeology, and 'new archaeology' had high value. Everything was to be measured in a positivistic way, and matters related to words such as 'religion' and 'beliefs' (*Glaubensvorstellungen*) were not seen as something that could be documented in a proper way. In this materialistic world of research, there was little room for developing approaches giving insights into mythology and cosmology. If 'religion' was considered at all, then it was reduced to something obscure and undefined – and 'religion' was mostly a matter of interest when it was able to give insights into social structure and economy. Religion represented a social institution among other social institutions. There was little room for transempirical powers, for gods and goddesses, or for the souls of the dead.

As an example of that time, I would like to mention the Swedish archaeologist Jarl Nordbladh, who in 1978 wrote as follows considering the Scandinavian rock carvings:

> At present there is little use in trying to find any specific meaning for the petroglyphs. As archaeologists we are in a form of pseudo-communication with the petroglyph-makers, and any such meaning would be rather "one-way". We cannot learn to understand the petroglyph language in order to use it again, because that is culturally impossible. (Nordbladh 1978, p. 74)

In the so-called post-processional era, around and after the turn of the millennium, things changed, and the acceptance level of incorporating interpretations related to religion seems very high. Some scholars have contributed to this tendency with studies related to notions of the afterlife, including the release of the soul and its possible way to an afterlife (Randsborg / Nybo 1986; Kaliff 1992; Randsborg 1993; Artelius 1994; Gräslund 1994; Widholm 1998; Goldhahn 1999; Kaul 2004; Goldhahn 2005; Kaul 2005a; Kaul 2005b; Kaul 2013a; Wehlin 2013).

What is unique in the Nordic Bronze Age Culture is its richness in pictures, in figural art. Images are seen on bronze objects, particularly on the blades of Late Bronze Age razors where a delicate miniature art is materializing, yielding valuable evidence as to the transcendental facies of a religion including a basic myth of the eternal daily and nightly voyage of the sun. Similarly, the rock carvings provide a unique picture archive of figural religious art. Some of the complex rock carvings bring us closer to the Bronze Age ritual world, illustrating the use of sacred objects including cult axes and lures. Considering other periods lacking this complex iconographical evidence, the possibilities for studying matters related to mythology are limited.

2 The last journey

As mentioned above, mortuary practices and burial monuments have, to a certain degree, been discussed as reflecting ideas related to the release of the soul and its way to an afterlife. The ship has been regarded as a vehicle for the soul, transporting it from the place of burial to some sort of an eternal life or a rebirth elsewhere; this idea is supported by rock carvings of ships occurring in burial contexts, such as the Sagaholm Mound, Småland, South Sweden (Goldhahn 1999). Also the horse figures on the kerb stone slabs of the Sagaholm Mound are regarded as representing a sort of prayer for the dead being reborn, just as the sun is reborn every morning by the divine horse, the sun horse (Goldhahn 1999, p. 204). However, it seems not quite clear what is meant by 'rebirth' (Swedish: *återfödelse*). Does it mean that the deceased was reborn somewhere in a world beyond, or that the soul was reborn/replaced in a new earthly body, being 're-incarnated' (Kaul 2004; Kaul 2005b)? Goldhahn tends to follow the second alternative. At any rate, the ultimate destination for the final journey of the soul still seems rather obscure.

The monumental Late Bronze Age stone ships of the Baltic Sea area, containing burials or being located near burial sites, have long since been regarded

as representations of the ship that brought the dead from the earthly world to the world beyond (Artelius 1994; Wehlin 2013). The stone ship served as a link or mediator, enabling the dead to reach the transcendental world. When a stone ship turns out to be empty, without any traces of a burial, this deep meaning should not be considered as diminished. On the contrary, when an empty stone ship, such as the one from Lofta (Småland, Sweden) that was recently excavated, is situated among burial cairns and other types of burials, then all the dead eventually being buried here would benefit from this monumental manifestation of transcendent communication (Fig. 1). It would serve as a central helper for many souls (Goldhahn 2009). Many of the Bronze Age stone ships have their prow marked by a larger stone or a separate stone just in front of the prow proper. Consequently, it is possible to discern the direction of the ships. The majority of the stone ships are 'sailing' southwards. This means that the ships point towards the highest position of the sun at midday (Wehlin 2013). Thus, the stone ship may mark a wish for the destination of the 'last journey': the sun.

The possibilities of connecting the ship with the last journey or the release of the soul have recently been considered on the basis of a number of princely burials of the Urnfield Culture. By analyzing the wagon fittings carrying plastic aquatic birds from cremation burials, such as Hart an der Alz, Königsbrunn and Hader, Germany, L. Nebelsick has convincingly argued that the wagon-frames should be regarded as

Fig. 1: Monumental stone ship, surrounded by burial cairns and other burial structures. Lofta, Tjust, North Småland, Sweden. Late Bronze Age. Photo: Flemming Kaul.

symbolic bird ships. When such a ship at a funeral was burnt with the dead resting in the very same ship, then a successful apotheosis was completed:

> Umrahmt von Sinnbildern des Opfers und der Transzendenz ruht der Tote in einem Schiff, seine Getreuen zum Ort der Apotheose anführend, um schließlich in Gold glänzend auf den sengenden Wogen des Feuers in den Himmel zu segeln. (Nebelsick 2014, p. 39)

Thus, in these cases the ship is seen merely as a divine mediator-transporter for the soul, connecting the earthly world with the transcendental world of the afterlife – like Charon's ferry. Few scholars seem to have taken the next consequential step and asked what the destination of the soul might be. I am certainly not claiming that the ship, for the people of the Bronze Age, did not have a role like Charon's ferry. I just want to consider the possibilities as to what happened after that transfer.

Among the few archaeologists who have made allusions as to the final destination of the soul is K. Randsborg, who, considering the iconography of the Sagaholm mound, has written that the nether world was "the land of the souls where the boats of the ancestors stranded, or off whose shores they drifted on what would be the sea of death" (Randsborg 1993, p. 96). When using the phrase "the land of the souls", the underworld could be regarded as a permanent location for the dead in the afterlife. However, J. Goldhahn, considering the words of K. Randsborg, gives a certain hope for another final destination. He points out that the souls are staying in the underworld while anticipating rebirth (Goldhahn 2013, p. 552).

On several occasions I have argued against the propositions by K. Randsborg (Kaul 2004; Kaul 2005a; Kaul 2005b), suggesting a much more dynamic role of the souls, related to the cosmology and the eternal voyage of the sun. In my opinion, the souls of the ancestors should not be considered as stranded in the underworld in their boats (although Bronze Age people might have been afraid of such a possibility, with serious eschatological consequences), but they were every day and every night traveling with the sun over the heavens at day-time, and through the underworld at night. Others have followed that line, such as P. Skoglund who mentions that those rock carvings closely related to the buried person (being part of a stone cist or burial monument; South Swedish Sagaholm, Kivik and Klinta) carry references connecting the dead with solar symbolism and the mythology. It is concluded that all these narratives seem to be concerned with the integration of the dead person into a mythological world where the sun is being transported above the heaven and below the earth by the means of horses and ships (Skoglund 2010, pp. 134 f.).

Below, I will argue for this most dynamic possibility for an afterlife, built on my studies of Scandinavian Late Bronze Age iconography on bronze objects such as the razors. Before dealing with the destiny of the souls, the pictorial evidence of a central myth related to the eternal voyage of the sun will be presented.

3 The eternal voyage of the sun. Right and left, up and down, light and darkness

Thanks to the studies by the present author, in which more than 420 Danish Late Bronze Age bronze objects carrying more than 800 ship images and other figures have been thoroughly recorded, it has been possible to reveal what seems to be a full cyclical myth of the daily and nightly voyage of the sun (Kaul 1998; Kaul 2004; Kaul 2005a). It was possible to find some specific correlations between the motifs, seemingly related to a left-right logic, which enable us to read or crack the code of the many images and to read a sequence of the motifs. Some motifs are related to the direction to the right; some motifs are related to the direction to the left. For instance, there are no ships sailing left with a sun image, where this direction is the only one represented, whereas there are many, more than 50, with ships sailing to the right. This is a significant observation that deserves further explanation. It should be mentioned that it must have been of great importance to mark the directions of, for instance, the ships, the prow being shown by its raised keel extension. It became clear that the direction or movement to the right was related to the day-time voyage of the sun, whereas the direction to the left was related to its nocturnal, underworld voyage. In the sense of cosmological order, right means up, heavens, day and light, and left means down, underworld, night and darkness.

The earliest Northern European expression of this cosmological left-right logic is represented by 'The Chariot of the Sun' from Trundholm Bog, Northwest Zealand, *c*. 1400 BC (Fig. 2). 'The Chariot of the Sun' consists of three main parts: 1) the plastic horse figure; 2) the solar disc decorated with concentric circles and complicated spiral patterns, one side of the disc being covered with thin gold foil; 3) the chassis with six four-spoked wheels on which both the solar disc and the horse figure are placed. As S. Müller (1903) already noted in the primary publication, it is important to

Figs. 2.1 and 2.2: 'The Chariot of the Sun', a divine horse is pulling the sun to the right and left, during day and night. Trundholm Mose, Northwestern Zealand, Denmark. *c*. 1400 BC. Photo: National Museum of Denmark/Arnold Mikkelsen.

distinguish between the horse and the sun-disc on the one hand, and the chassis with its wheels on the other hand. The solar disc and the horse illustrate the belief that the sun on its eternal journey was pulled by a divine horse. The carriage was not part of this notion. The sun image and the horse were placed on wheels in order to demonstrate (or control) the movement of the sun in the rituals of the Bronze Age. Thus, the name 'The Chariot of the Sun' is actually a misleading one, introduced in Germany during the 1930s (German: *Sonnenwagen*) (Sprockhoff 1936, p. 2; Kaul 2010, p. 527). In the primary publication, S. Müller did not employ this term (Danish: *Solvognen)* but refers to it as the "Sun image from Trundholm" (Danish: *Solbilledet fra Trundholm*).

The 'Chariot of the Sun' renders intelligible the idea that the sun was pulled by a divine horse, the sun controlling this horse by means of a string. On the rim of the sun-disc, the remains of a fragile eyelet can be seen, and a corresponding eyelet is found under the horse's neck. A string must have passed through the loops to link the disc with the horse (Müller 1903, p. 110; Kaul 1998, p. 32).

The two sides of the sun-disc are not completely identical. Some differences of the lay-out of the spiral decoration can be observed. But most importantly, one side is covered with gold foil, and on the same side a row of short radial grooves can be seen, marking the edge of the gold covering. The other side is not covered with gold, and there are no radial grooves, no marked halo. When looking at the golden and radiant side of the sun-disc, we notice that the horse is facing to the right, moving to the right together with the sun. This is the direction of the travel of the sun as seen from the northern hemisphere, when the spectator faces the sun, follows the sun. When we turn over the sun-image so that we can see the darker, non-golden side of the sun-disc without halo, then the horse is facing left, moving left. In our physical world, however, the sun never moves to the left. But if, in the world view of the Bronze Age, the earth was considered to be flat, then these directions make sense. The observable 'travel' direction of the sun at daytime is from left to right. This direction changes when the sun meets the horizon at sunset. After sunset the sun has to return to its starting point at sunrise by moving left (from right to left), below the surface of the flat earth, through the darkness of the underworld, and in an extinguished state, not radiant. At sunrise, then, the sun changes its direction to the day-time direction, to the right.

The images on the Late Bronze Age bronze objects, such as the razors, demonstrate that other agents are helping the sun with its eternal journey. Let our starting point be the morning, the crucial time of sunrise, the re-birth of the sun, life and light. One of the most illustrative razors, without find provenance, probably from Jutland, gives interesting evidence as to how the sunrise was perceived in the cyclical myth of the Bronze Age (Fig. 3). By means of the raised keel extensions, it is possible to read the directions of the two ships and to see the right-left logic work. The bottom ship is sailing to the left – being the night ship –, the top one is sailing to the right – being the day ship. From the stem of the left-sailing night ship, a fish is pulling the sun to the right and upwards, the direction of the morning sun. What we are looking at is the

Fig. 3: Sunrise. A divine fish is pulling the sun up from the stem of the night-ship to the morning-ship; razor, without find provenance, probably Jutland, *c.* 800 BC. Moesgaard Museum. Photo: Flemming Kaul.

rebirth of the sun at sunrise. Here, the directions of night and day are meeting. This razor clearly evidences that the night-ship is below the day-ship, the night-ship belonging to the sphere beyond, the underworld, the day-ship belonging to the sphere above, the heavens. Right and left, up and down, day and night, light and darkness meet here, the mythological fish being the mediator between the night-ship and the morning-ship (Kaul 1998; Kaul 2004; Kaul / Freudenberg 2007).

Other razors show that the fish – for a certain time – could have been allowed to sail on with the ship until it was devoured by a bird of prey. When the fish is out of the picture, the horse is ready to take over the transport of the sun. The role of the horse is best seen on a razor from Neder Hvolris (Northern Jutland, Denmark) depicting a fine horse pulling the sun away from a ship. It is the sun-horse that at mid-day takes over the transport from the morning-ship (Fig. 4). On yet another Danish razor from Vandling at Haderslev (Southern Jutland, Denmark), the horse seems to actually land on a ship, and this motif is consequently interpreted as the sun-horse landing on the afternoon-ship, handing over the transport of the sun to this ship (Fig. 5).

Finally, at sunset, a snake takes over the sun from the afternoon-ship. This snake probably helped the extinguished sun into its nightly underworld and left-turned voyage. It should be regarded as representing positive forces of cosmological order, working as a mediator between the underworld and the world above (Kaul 2009). During the night we meet the fish – here in connection with left sailing ships. It could help or assist the sun on its voyage through the dangers of the underworld. And it was ready to perform its important task of helping the sun from the night-ship to the morning-ship at dawn.

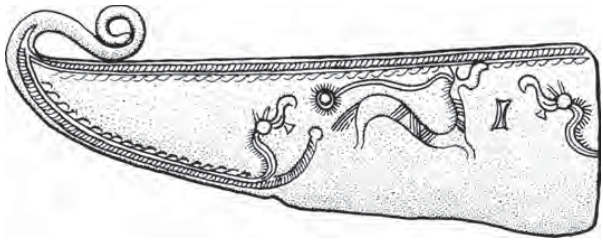

Fig. 4: A razor from Neder Hvolris, Northern Jutland, Denmark, *c.* 800 BC. The sun-horse is pulling the sun to the right just in front of the stem of a ship sailing to the right. The ship has a highly raised keel-extension and a stem with a horse's head. The ship is folded, and the other stem is seen on the right. Drawing: Bjørn Skaarup, the National Museum of Denmark.

Fig. 5: A razor from Vandling, Southern Jutland, Denmark, *c.* 900 BC. The sun-horse seems to be landing on the ship, where the sun is seen to the left of the fan-shaped symbol. The slightly raised keel extension to the right indicates the direction of sailing. Photo: Flemming Kaul, the National Museum of Denmark.

Including motifs from some other Danish razors, a full day-and-night-journey of the sun – the central myth of the Nordic Bronze Age – is shown graphically (Fig. 6). We see the sun-ship as the transporter of the sun, and we see divine zoomorphic helpers of the sun. It should here be noted that the horse could not bring the sun to the snake, or the fish could not bring the sun to the horse. There is always a ship needed in-between as a sort of mediator.

There seem to have been different versions of this system. For instance, the snake could have had a role in the morning, here also helping the sun. The horse could also have had a role during the night, perhaps at the lowest point of the underworld. This cyclical-mythological system seems to work well without the involvement of anthropomorphic gods. We are dealing primarily with the sun as a non-personified manifestation of the highest power.

It should not generally be dismissed that gods in human form were appearing in the Late Bronze Age, not as a full parnassos of gods but in the shape of one single deity, the sun-god (Kaul 2005a). Renderings of human-like figures on the bronze

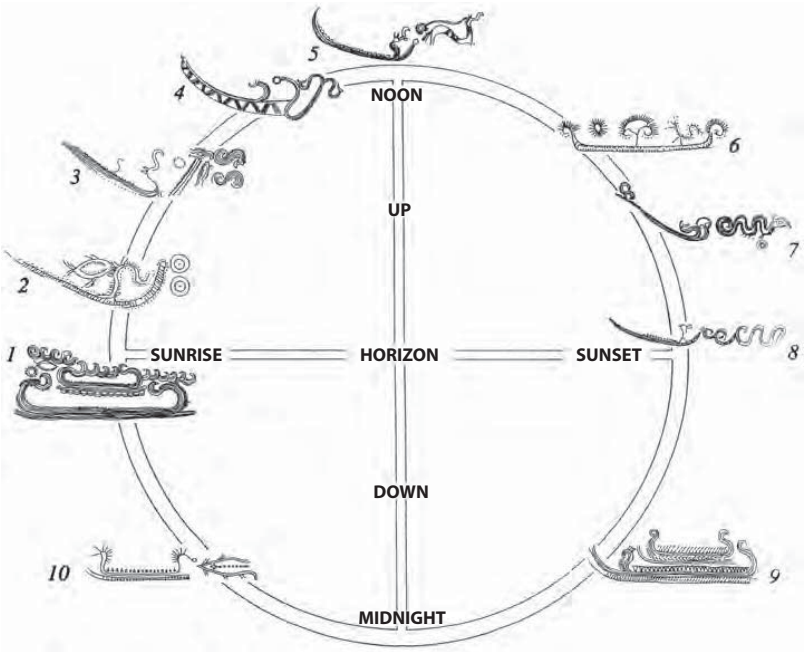

Fig. 6: Motifs from Danish razors, Late Bronze Age, *c*. 1100–500 BC, showing different points of the cyclical movement of the sun.

1. Sunrise. The fish pulls the rising sun up from the night-ship to the morning-ship. See no. 6.
2. For a while the fish is allowed to sail on with the ship.
3. The fish is to be devoured by a bird of prey. Stylized sun-horses (S-figures) are ready to fetch the sun. See no. 5.
4. Two sun-horses are about to pull the sun from the ship.
5. At noon the sun-horse has collected the sun from the ship. See no. 1.
6. In the afternoon the sun-horse lands with the sun on the sun-ship.
7. Sometime after the sun-horse has landed, the sun is taken over by the snake from the afternoon-ship.
8. The snake is concealing the sun in its spiral curls. It will soon lead the sun down under the horizon.
9. Two night-ships sailing to the left. The sun is not visible, extinguished and dark on its voyage through the underworld.
10. A night-ship followed by a fish swimming to the left. The fish is ready to fulfill its task at sunrise. Drawing: Tidsskriftet *Skalk* and Flemming Kaul

objects are extremely rare. The most illustrative example of human-like creatures is seen on a razor from the southern part of the Jutland Peninsula, where two figures are paddling a ship (Fig. 7). The heads are shaped like sun images with a halo. This could be the sun-god in its human-like appearance, with a head shown as the sun with its

Fig. 7: A razor from Southern Jutland, exact provenance unknown, showing two human-like figures, probably two aspects of the sun god, paddling the sun-ship. Late Bronze Age, *c*. 800 BC. Drawing: Eva Koch, the National Museum of Denmark.

rays, the sun-god being the sun itself. Since there are two identical figures, one could represent the sun during daytime, the other during its nocturnal phase. Another possibility is that the two sun figures represent two periods of day-time, for instance the sun before and after noon.

There have, of course, been other divine characters or helpers of the sun than those mentioned here, and not all of them were moving around. A possible example of a god of the underworld should be considered. On a number of rock carvings, particularly in Bohuslän, Sweden, a net figure is seen, often with human features (Kaul 2009). The capability of a net is to stop and catch something. When the net figure is highly anthropomorphized, it appears as a monster-like creature (Fig. 8). Such a god with its net could be considered a negative chaos-power with the ability to stop the sun during its dangerous voyage through the underworld. Through rituals, humans could prevent that the sun was stopped by such chaos-powers, thereby making it possible for the sun to rise.

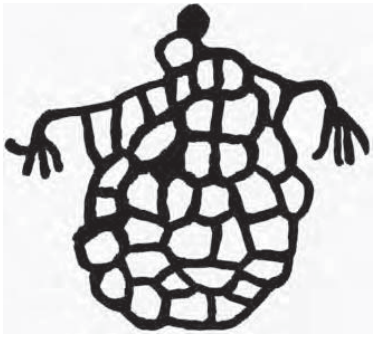

Fig. 8: A possible net-monster of the underworld that could impede the nocturnal movement of the sun. Rock carving, Trättelanda, Bohuslän, Sweden. Photo-graphic: Flemming Kaul in collaboration with Tanums Hällristningsmuseum, Underslös.

4 Left-and-right logic and language

It is quite remarkable that this Bronze Age notion of the relationship between the direction left and the underworld and darkness is seemingly still working in the Italian (and former Latin) language. In Italian the word for left – *sinistra* – has an almost undefined sub-meaning in its perception, related to something ominous, unpleasant or uncomfortable – and to darkness: in English, to something sinister. As an example, I would like to quote from one of Winston Churchill's war time speeches in the House of Commons, June 18, 1940 ("This was their finest hour"):

> But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties [...] (Churchill [ed.] 2003, p. 229).

So if we, in English, would have called 'left' 'sinister', then we would have had the same feeling of sombre underlying meanings or strata of the word as are present in Italian.

In the summer of 2011, the author of these pages delivered a paper at the research centre of rock art in Valcamonica, Northern Italy. Here, the left-and-right logic of the Bronze Age iconography was in focus. I underlined the connections between the left and the underworld, and the Italian word *sinistra* was naturally included. To my astonishment, some among the audience became moved: suddenly they felt why 'left' (*sinistra*) incorporated these ominous meanings. One of the Italians told me that now he understood why his school-teacher some years ago had said that he must not write with his left hand because this is the hand of the Devil. The connections between the left (*sinistra*) and the underworld became clear. It was quite fascinating to realize that Danish Bronze Age iconography, in a sense, could contribute to the explanation of the perceptions of the word *sinistra* in the Italian language of today: the pictures shown of 'The Chariot of the Sun' could, in a pedagogical way, serve as enlightenment. Suddenly, Bronze Age cosmology and left-right-logic became present.

When considering afterlife possibilities, it should be mentioned that among the ancient Greeks one can find evidence of connections between the right and left directions and up and down, light and darkness. In Plato's eschatological 'Myth of Er' in his *Republic*, the souls of men are imagined as being divided into two groups by their judges: the just travel to the right, upwards, through the sky, and the unjust go left, downwards, into the earth (Lloyd 1973, p. 171; Plato: *Republic* 10.614–621).

5 An afterlife with the sun – on the sun-ship

If it is accepted that the ships represented on the Nordic Late Bronze Age bronzes are ships related to a central myth concerning the eternal voyage of the sun, then we must

seriously consider the possibility that the strokes or short lines on the images of ships are representing the crew. Thus, these ships represented on, for instance, razors and neck rings are not to be considered as earthly ships used in rituals as depicted in the rock carvings, in particular in Bohuslän, Western Sweden.

Strokes representing the crew are found on more than half the ship-representations on the bronzes from the Late Bronze Age. In some cases the strokes end in a dot, representing the head, in other cases the strokes are shown in pairs, probably representing two paddlers on the same thwart (Fig. 9). Mostly, the strokes are just strokes. In a number of cases, the strokes are not just vertical lines rising from the hull, but are sloping forward towards the prow (Fig. 10). Statistically, an accordance can be observed between the sailing direction of the ship and the sloping of the strokes (Kaul 1998, p. 246). It is quite natural for slanting crew-strokes to slope in the direction where the ship is moving: The crew, while paddling, will be facing to the direction of movement, their bodies will take up a position slanting in the direction of movement as a result of the physical phenomenon known as 'the parallelogram of forces'. These observations demonstrate that the strokes are not to be considered as some sort of ornaments, but as true representations of the crew. Most significant is the information that the members of the crew on these mythological ships are at work, keenly paddling. The crew is actively facilitating the movement of the ship. Even though the religious art of the Bronze Age is highly stylized, it seems possible to extract a sort of 'realistic' core through analyses.

Fig. 9: Strokes representing the crew, here in pairs, on left-sailing night-ships, razor from Jerne, Southern Jutland, Denmark, *c*. 800 BC. Photo: Flemming Kaul, the National Museum of Denmark.

The strokes representing the crew are seen on right-sailing day-ships and left-sailing night-ships. The crew or crews are working both during day and night. The ships with these strokes are seen in combination with sun images and mythological beings, such as sun horses and fish (Fig. 11). The crew of the sun-ships must belong to the transcendental world. The strokes may be considered representations of gods, but since they are relatively small and of equal size (and what is understood as an anthropomorphized sun god is much larger), I would prefer another solution. It does

Fig. 10: On a razor from Egtved, Eastern Jutland, Denmark, strokes representing the crew of the ship are leaning forward, on a right-sailing day-ship. *c.* 800 BC. British Museum. Photo: Flemming Kaul.

Fig. 11: On a razor from Bystrup Mark, Northern Jutland, Denmark, the members of the crew are leaning forward, in the sailing direction. Above a fragmented sun image and what seems to be a stylized sun-horse, probably pulling the sun to the right. *c.* 800 BC. Viborg Stiftsmuseum. Photo: Flemming Kaul.

not seem unreasonable to regard these strokes on the mythological ships as the souls of the dead, perhaps humans 'deified' by death, or some 'select few' given the honorable task of being part of the crew of the sun-ship. Thus, the soul shared the fate of the sun on its eternal journey round and round and up and down, right and left, over

the heavens and through the underworld. The souls themselves became a guarantee for cosmic order, securing the return and rebirth of the sun and life. The afterlife of human beings seems connected to a basic cosmological myth (Kaul 2004; Kaul 2005a; Kaul 2005b; Kaul 2013a). When relating the afterlife to the cyclical movement of the sun, as deduced from the cosmological narrative, there is no permanent place for the souls, or at least those souls represented in the pictorial texts. Perhaps there was another final destination for those not belonging to the highest echelons of society in the underworld, or in a land in the far west? We shall never know. Perhaps the honorable afterlife with the sun was restricted to those few whose burials were accompanied by objects carrying iconography, including objects with spirals or concentric circles. Possibly those objects carrying a complex iconography, such as the razors, were considered a sort of prayer book, depicting the wish for the dead to become members of the crew of the very sun-ship shown on the razor.

A mutual dependency between the life-giving sun and the souls of humans may therefore have been created in Bronze Age mythology; the sun was dependent, to a degree, on the assistance of the souls of human beings, but the souls were naturally deeply dependent on the divine sun. The souls shared the sun's fate on its eternal journey. When suggesting such a mutual dependency, phenomena such as a cult of the dead get a rather more important meaning. If the dead were honored in the right way – for instance in cult houses at the burial mounds (Mikkelsen 2013) –, then the souls of the dead could assist the sun in the best way, which could certainly benefit the living humans on the surface of the earth. In other words, in such a religious system, 'death-cult' and 'life-cult' become somehow undistinguishable. It would have been great to believe or know that your deceased father or mother was now among the ancestors paddling the sun-ship.

On some razors we find figures that could be determined as aberrant souls, since they deviate from the normal picture of strokes representing the crew. On a certain number of sun-ships, figures such as the strokes representing the crew in the ship occur on the stem of the ship, outside the hull (Kaul 1998, p. 246). This is seen on the razor showing the sunrise situation. For me, this observation does not pose any serious problem. In the oblique logic of religion and iconography, the souls could be seen everywhere on the sun-ship, the ship being virtually packed with souls. When you find the souls on the stem of the ship, in the shape of a horse's head or the head of an aquatic bird, then the souls could manifest themselves as hairs in the mane of the horse or as feathers of the head and the neck of the bird.

In a number of cases – razors – there is some uncertainty as to whether it really is strokes that have been considered to be a representation of the crew: sometimes, small S-shaped marks are employed instead of strokes. The S-shaped figures can be of the same size as the normal strokes representing the crew, but they can also appear in a larger scale, being more dominating. This is seen on a razor, probably from Jutland (Kaul 1998, cat. no. 377), with stems not just in the shape of a horse's head, but in the shape of a full figure of a horse including four legs (Fig. 12). When being compared to

other examples of the stylized religious art of the Late Bronze Age (also in a broader European sense), these well-grown S-shaped figures should be considered renderings of aquatic birds or necks of aquatic birds. It seems most reasonable that the souls of the dead could take the shape of birds. Thus, these enigmatic stylized (aquatic) bird figures being part of the crew of the ship can be understood as representations of the souls.

Fig. 12: On a razor without find provenance, probably Jutland, Denmark, stylized bird-figures form the crew. They are seemingly facing the prow, in accordance with the sailing direction to the right. The figures may be understood as representations of souls, here manifesting themselves in a bird-like shape. *c.* 800 BC. Moesgaard Museum. Photo: Flemming Kaul.

In many places the souls of the dead can manifest themselves as birds or bird figures. The most prominent example is the *Ba*-bird of Ancient Egypt, being a rendering of the mobile soul element, the *Ba*-soul. The Egyptian mobile soul, *Ba*, is often shown as a falcon with a human head. This symbolizes a human being in a shape that is free like a falcon, the falcon itself being a day-time manifestation of the sun, of the sun-god Ra. The *Ba*-bird is frequently seen depicted in tombs or as vignettes in the *Book of the Dead*; it can fly over the mummy, it can fly out of the burial (Wilkinson 1994, p. 99).

6 Wider perspectives

By analyzing the imagery on Nordic Late Bronze Age bronzes, a most dynamic after-life for the dead, or at least some persons, seems to emerge. The souls are moving round and round with the sun. In seeking similar notions, one cannot avoid to make some comparisons with Ancient Egyptian religion. There seem to be some interesting

similarities between Nordic Bronze Age religion and Egyptian religion, albeit on a general structural level. In both places fish and snakes are involved in the voyage of the sun, although the divine sun horse is absent in Egyptian religion. The sun-ships, both day-ships and night-ships, are also a common feature.

I am not claiming that the religious specialists of the North were influenced by Egyptian religion, even though I would not totally dismiss the possibility of a transfer of certain ideas, especially with reference to recent results demonstrating Bronze Age exchange networks reaching the Mediterranean (Kaul 2013b; Varberg et al. 2015). It should be kept in mind that the notion of the sun-ship was widespread across almost the whole of Europe, from the shores of the Mediterranean to Scandinavia. The central European Late Bronze Age bird-sunship (*Vogel-Sonnenbarke*) appears with a certain strength, giving evidence of some basic common religious ideas embracing larger areas.

Let us finally consider the structural parallel concerning the souls' connection to the sun-ship, in order to compare it to the ideas related to the (royal) afterlife as expressed in Egyptian pyramid texts, here from Pharaoh Unas' pyramid at Saqqara (c. 2350 BC, the last ruler of the fifth dynasty), where the pharaoh is the most prominent member of the crew of the sun-ship of Re: "Unas may sit on your seat, he may row in the sky in thy boat, O Re! This Unas pushes off from the Earth (being) in thy boat O Re. When thou comest out of the Horizon, he has his scepter in his hand as one who sails thy boat, O Re." (Piankoff 1968, p. 40; Utt. 267; Kaul 2004, p. 193). Much later the pyramid texts were copied, first on sarcophagi, then on papyri; hence, through these prayers, persons outside the royal family could share parts of the royal afterlife.

In Ancient Egyptian religion, the sun god Re in his ship knows the way through the darkness of the world below, the way towards his (the sun's) rebirth in the morning, having done this since the beginning of time. The sun god Re becomes the guide for his son, the pharaoh. When the pharaoh follows his immortal father, he himself can also attain immortality. In the Late Kingdom, it became possible for a larger number of dead to sail in the ship with the sun god and the pharaoh during the nightly voyage. In the text *Amduat* in Thutmosis III's (1490–1439 BC) burial chamber, the ship of the sun god is referred to as the ship of the millions (Abt / Hornung 2003, p. 24). "In der zwölften Nachtstunde vollzieht sich täglich die Neugeburt der Sonne. [...] Sie alle (Götter) ziehen die Barke mit ihren ‚*Millionen*' von seligen Toten durch den Leib der riesigen Schlange hindurch." (Hornung et al. 2006, p. 27). The passage through this gigantic serpent makes possible the rebirth of the sun god, the pharaoh and the millions of souls at sunrise.

Obviously, when touching upon the religion of Ancient Egypt, many questions arise to which it seems impossible to find decisive answers. Did the Nordic Bronze Age people have ideas of two or more soul elements, like the mobile *Ba* and the stationary *Ka*? I tend to believe so (Gräslund 1994; Kaul 2004). Did the chiefly or princely leaders of the Nordic Bronze Age consider themselves as sons or daughters of the sun? I tend to believe so, given how saturated the rich burials are with solar images and solar

symbolism, including the spiral. Could the leaders, by their divine afterlife related to the sun god, guarantee an eternal life for people of lower ranks of society (as hinted at in the *Amduat* in Thutmosis III's tomb)?

In any event, the ship in Scandinavian Bronze Age religion was more than merely a means of transfer for the soul from the burial site to its final destination. The sun-ship, the solar barque, was the final destination, though in no way static.

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Leszek Gardeła

The Slavic Way of Death. Archaeological Perspectives on Otherworld Journeys in Early Medieval Poland

Abstract: The early medieval Slavs who inhabited the area of Poland did not leave behind any textual sources regarding their beliefs about journeys to the Otherworld. We do not have a Slavic equivalent of the *Poetic Edda* or any other vernacular texts which illuminate the pre-Christian world views of these people. Nevertheless, it is still possible to get a glimpse of their conceptions of the Otherworld through a careful analysis of later materials (e.g. folkloristic accounts) and the rich archaeological evidence from the early Middle Ages. By critically combining different categories of data, this paper presents a range of hypotheses about how the early medieval Slavs may have imagined their cosmos and various otherworldly destinations. The article begins with a presentation of different ideas about the soul and various places to which souls were believed to have ventured. Some remarks are also provided regarding the different names of Slavic Otherworlds and the gods who may have presided over these realms. Based on this material, and critically acknowledging its often scarce and problematic nature, it is argued that the Slavs may have shared a belief in a tri-partite cosmos comprising sky/heaven (the realm of the gods), earth (the realm of humans) and underworld (the realm of the dead). This tri-partite cosmos, it is suggested, could also be visually represented in archaeological finds such as the Zbrucz statue, a number of intricately decorated knife sheaths and copper alloy spurs. After examining textual and folkloristic accounts as well as archaeological and iconographic sources, further parts of the article focus on different forms of burials among the early medieval Slavs dating from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries. Based on the external and internal composition of these graves and the different objects that accompany the deceased, attempts are made to understand the symbolic undertones of past funerals. It is argued that the form of burial and items interred with the dead could allude to Slavic beliefs about how they journeyed to the Otherworld and the activities they performed there.

1 Slavic eschatological beliefs – introductory remarks

Eschatological beliefs of the pre-Christian Slavs who inhabited the area of early medieval Poland are very difficult to unravel today. Before the adoption of Christianity the knowledge about Slavic gods, supernatural beings, cosmos and afterlife was

transmitted from generation to generation through oral tradition or 'bodylore', and unfortunately no vernacular textual accounts were written down at that time. The same holds true for other West Slavic tribes from the area of Pomerania and Polabia. Practically all written sources that hint at their world views were put to parchment by foreign observers or commentators – as such they are probably biased in many ways. Coming from strictly Christian milieus, the authors of medieval chronicles, which preserve information about the beliefs and ritual practices of the Slavs, may have either misunderstood what they had heard or seen and perhaps, in some instances, even made it up. While a range of descriptions of Slavic paganism are impossible to verify due to the lack of any other evidence to compare them with, the situation is not overtly pessimistic – there are some accounts for which we might indeed find material reflections in the available archaeological and iconographic sources. However, such comparative and cross-disciplinary analyses, as tempting as they are, must always be conducted with considerable caution.

Because of these problems, past scholars (especially historians of religion) either refrained from debating Slavic pre-Christian eschatology or, in their tentative attempts to reconstruct these beliefs, they were forced to use considerably late ethnographic evidence.[1] By employing what could be labelled as a 'retrospective method' (i.e. using chronologically late sources from a particular cultural milieu to examine its more distant past), they argued that some folkloristic material may have preserved traces of genuine pagan traditions that date back to the Middle Ages. From the early twentieth century onwards, this method has been rather enthusiastically applied (with regard to different kinds of issues, not just eschatology) by some of the most prominent Polish scholars[2] of Slavic beliefs and mythology, such as Stanisław Urbańczyk,[3] Aleksander Brückner,[4] Leonard Pełka,[5] Joanna and Ryszard Tomiccy[6] and in particular Aleksander Gieysztor.[7] Today, the retrospective approach is also frequently employed by contemporary researchers like Stanisław Bylina,[8] Wojciech Chudziak,[9] Kamil Kajkowski,[10] Leszek Paweł Słupecki, Paweł Szczepanik[11] and others. However, it is often the case that using chronologically late textual sources in interpretations of archaeological finds is done without any source critical commentary

1 For a valuable overview of studies on Slavic pre-Christian beliefs, see Słupecki 2006.
2 See discussion on the methodologies employed by early scholars of Slavic beliefs, especially Aleksander Gieysztor, in Słupecki 2006.
3 Urbańczyk 1947; Urbańczyk 1948; Urbańczyk 1991.
4 Brückner 1918; Brückner 1924; Brückner 1980.
5 Pełka 1960.
6 See, for example, Tomicki 1974; Tomiccy 1975; Tomicki 1976.
7 Gieysztor 2006.
8 Bylina 1992; Bylina 1999; Bylina 2012.
9 See, for example, Chudziak 2006.
10 See, for example, Kajkowski 2015.
11 See, for example, Szczepanik 2010, pp. 29–30, 39; Szczepanik 2017.

for choosing such a research method. It is noteworthy that most of the ethnographic texts so eagerly used in reconstructions of pre-Christian beliefs are younger than the medieval materials to which they are compared by at least 700 years. Reviewing some of the recently published works on Slavic paganism, it seems that because the retrospective approach is so deeply anchored in Polish academic traditions and so frequently applied in contemporary research, scholars see no reason to discuss its validity. Nevertheless, critical awareness is necessary in order to move forward in our studies and overcome authoritative or dogmatic statements which are often based on very uncertain premises. Far too many claims have been made about pre-Christian beliefs of the Slavs based on problematic and late evidence, and over the course of time, instead of being seen only as tentative hypotheses and interpretations, they have become accepted as established truths. A good example of such problems is the notion of 'vampirism' and the so-called 'anti-vampire burials'. The misuse of the term 'vampirism' has continued in Polish research since the 1950s and only recently scholars have finally seen the need to revise earlier views on alleged revenants and unusual funerary practices in this part of Europe.[12] It is not the aim of this paper, however, to provide a thorough critique of the methodological issues outlined above, as this would require a separate study of considerable length. I shall begin this article by offering a range of critical remarks on the possible otherworldly destinations for the dead, as inferred from various textual accounts (medieval and ethnographic). The discussion will be supplemented by selected iconographic materials and followed by an overview of past and present approaches to early medieval archaeology in Poland. Further sections of this paper will explore the performance and symbolic undertones of funerals in this part of Europe and the possible meanings of various grave types and grave goods. These considerations will attempt to offer a range of new ideas about how the Slavs imagined the Otherworld(s) and how they articulated these beliefs in the treatment of the dying and the dead.

2 Otherworldly destinations for the dead

Scholarly discussions on journeys to the Otherworld often begin by exploring the idea of the soul. In past societies the soul could be understood and imagined in various ways and, judging by the available textual sources, among some people (for example the early medieval Scandinavians) it was believed that some individuals had more than one soul.[13] On certain occasions (and not only upon death), the soul(s) could leave the body, engage in different activities and travel over very long distances. Some

12 See latest discussions in Gardeła / Duma 2013; Gardeła / Kajkowski 2013; Gardeła 2015; Gardeła 2017.

13 On the concept of the soul in Nordic societies, see Strömbäck 1975.

souls could even be stolen, and their retrieval would require the help of skilled ritual specialists. As Kamil Kajkowski[14] has recently observed, we are unsure if the early medieval Slavs knew about the idea of the soul at all. He correctly notes that the first accounts attesting the Slavic belief in the existence of the soul begin to appear in late medieval times. According to these accounts, the soul behaved in a similar way to living people – it required food and drink, but it could also walk and leave clearly visible marks of its presence, for example footprints. Extant sources imply that the souls of the dead demanded respect, especially when sharing the same space with the living people, for example within the household. Therefore, while working within the remit of the house, one had to be careful and avoid hurting these souls accidentally (e.g. by pouring dirty water on them or using sharp objects inappropriately).[15] Ethnographic accounts mention that while some souls of the dead could occupy a special place within the household, others resided somewhere in the wild. There is yet another group of souls which upon the individual's death would venture to the Otherworld and return to the land of the living only on very special occasions. Where and to what kind of Otherworld(s) the souls of the dead may have gone will be the subject of the following analysis.

2.1 Slavic Otherworld(s) in medieval accounts

There is only one medieval account which briefly comments on what was allegedly believed to happen to Western Slavs after they died. The author of this account, bishop Thietmar of Merseburg, simply wrote that when the body dies, everything ends.[16] This statement might suggest that the Slavs had no idea of afterlife at all, but it can hardly be true, given the mentions of Slavic Otherworld(s) in later sources and the great effort taken to furnish graves in early medieval cemeteries. Another important account that may potentially shed some light on Slavic conceptions of the Otherworld is provided by Ebbo, one of the authors who recorded the life and deeds of St. Otto. Ebbo described a statue of a Slavic god named Triglav (*Trigelawo*) which stood in the Pomeranian town of Szczecin. The statue had three heads, the reason for which was that the god ruled over three realms – sky/heaven, earth and the underworld. Interestingly, as Ebbo noted, the eyes and mouths of the statue were covered with gold so that the god would not see the human sins.[17] Some further details about the statue of

14 Kajkowski 2015, p. 258.
15 Moszyński 1967, p. 586.
16 See comments in Kajkowski 2015, p. 270; for Polish and English editions of Thietmar's chronicle, see Jedlicki (ed./transl.) 1953; Warner (ed./transl.) 2001.
17 Gieysztor 2006, p. 148.

Triglav and the temple in which it stood are also given in the chronicle of Herbord.[18] Herbord made a remark that the statue was destroyed by St. Otto who cut off its heads and sent them to Rome. We may infer from these sources that among the Pomeranian Slavs a belief in a tri-partite division of the cosmos seems to have existed. Interestingly, some material reflections of this belief could potentially be seen in Slavic material culture, which will be discussed in more detail further below.

As mentioned above, a significant problem that arises while attempting to reconstruct Slavic beliefs regarding the Otherworld(s) is that, apart from the laconic mentions in medieval texts, all other available accounts concerning the idea of afterlife are usually from relatively modern times. These folkloristic sources from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are often patchy or inconsistent and refer to various areas dotted across the Slavic world.[19] Because they have such a broad chronological and geographical span, it is difficult to create a consistent picture of past world views and beliefs based on these sources alone. Another problem is that we often know such accounts indirectly and through rather brief ethnographic notes and secondary publications. It is noteworthy that many past scholars, especially those from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, did not provide precise references to the sources they had used in their studies. Hence, the important details about the exact origin and dating of these accounts are lacking and are impossible to retrieve today. Being critically aware of these methodological problems, in the following sections I have nonetheless tried to amalgamate the information about Slavic Otherworld(s) gathered from various publications. What follows is therefore only a very hypothetical reconstruction, and we cannot know for certain if (or to what degree) it actually reflects the world views of the Slavs from the early medieval period.

2.2 *Nawia* and *Naw*

In a range of studies on Slavic pre-Christian religion(s), many of which rely heavily on ethnographic and/or linguistic evidence, we can find attempts to describe how the pagan Slavs may have imagined the Otherworld(s). A word which often appears in discussions on Slavic eschatological beliefs is *Nawia*.[20] We encounter it mainly in textual sources from Eastern Europe where it seems to have referred to the world of the dead. Unfortunately, apart from the name, we do not have any further information about where this Otherworld was located (in the sense of mythical geography) or what exactly it was like. Interestingly, however, in various Slavic languages the word

18 The account is quoted and discussed in Labuda 2003, pp. 173 f. See also remarks in Gieysztor 2006, pp. 149 ff.

19 For a valuable overview of sources referring to Slavic folklore and beliefs, see Moszyński 1967.

20 Bylina 1992, p. 15; Szyjewski 2003, pp. 77 ff.

naw/nav and its variants also appear to be associated with demonological beliefs,[21] and this observation can provide some further hints. Jerzy Strzelczyk[22] writes that the word *naw* (Polish nominative singular *naw* or *nawka*; Polish nominative plural *nawie*) referred to demons who came into existence as a result of untimely or tragic death (e.g. miscarried children or those that had died before being baptized), but it could also be used to describe deceased unmarried girls, sorcerers, criminals and victims of murder. In his comprehensive study on Slavic religion, Andrzej Szyjewski[23] provides a detailed list of all kinds of supernatural creatures whose names allude to the word *nav*/*naw*, and these include, for example, *nawki*, later known as *mawki* or *majki*. The demons known as *naw* were regarded as malevolent beings who could cause threat to the living people and who envied their life. Could it be, therefore, that *Nawia* was an Otherworld for those who died a bad death?

Both Jerzy Strzelczyk[24] and Stanisław Bylina[25] have also suggested that the word *naw* may be associated with the pagan deity of death known as Nyja, who is mentioned in the chronicle of Wincenty Kadłubek dating to the fifteenth century.[26] Wincenty Kadłubek wrote that Nyja (equated in his account with the Greek god Pluto) was considered by the Slavs as the deity of the underworld and a protector of human souls. He mentioned that the Slavs prayed to Nyja, asking for the provision of a good place in the Otherworld. According to Kadłubek, a special temple dedicated to Nyja was built in the town of Gniezno (in today's Greater Poland) and 'pilgrims' from different parts of Polish lands came to visit it. Although Kadłubek's descriptions of Slavic pagan beliefs are often regarded as problematic and of questionable value, Strzelczyk[27] argues that Nyja may have actually been a genuine pagan deity. On a linguistic basis, the name Nyja can potentially be related to contemporary Polish verbs like *niknąć* ('to disappear') or *nędznieć* ('to be in misery'), and this corresponds rather well with the deity's association with dying and death.[28] According to Krzysztof Tomasz Witczak,[29] Nyja may be a Polish equivalent of the Greek goddess Enyo. Unfortunately, nothing more is known about this deity, and he/she does not appear in any other medieval sources.

21 Kajkowski 2015, p. 270.
22 Strzelczyk 2007, pp. 134 f.
23 Szyjewski 2003, p. 176.
24 Strzelczyk 2007, pp. 134 f.
25 Bylina 1992, p. 15.
26 For a translation and edition of Kadłubek's chronicle, see Kürbis (ed./transl.) 1996.
27 Strzelczyk 2007, p. 138.
28 Strzelczyk 2007, p. 138.
29 Witczak 1994, pp. 123–132.

2.3 Wyraj, Raj, Irij

In his study on Slavic beliefs, in addition to debating the notion of *Nawia*, Szyjewski[30] has argued that the Slavs initially had only one Otherworld which surrounded the human realm and was separated from it by water. This Otherworld was known as *Wyraj*, *Raj* or *Irij*.[31] Interestingly, not only people ventured there after death but also different kinds of animals. Apparently, there was also a special *Wyraj* dedicated only to snakes, cuckoos, swallows, larks, jackdaws and crows. According to Szyjewski,[32] *Wyraj* was imagined as a garden surrounded by an iron fence with a gate that could not be passed by the living. Szyjewski's views have been recently further expanded by Kajkowski,[33] who has argued that the Slavic Otherworld could be imagined as an island, i.e. a place physically and conceptually separated from the mainland by water. This idea is particularly sound because in some Slavic areas (especially among the Eastern Slavs), there existed a mortuary custom which involved placing special wooden planks over various waterways to grant the souls of recently deceased people a safe passage to the Otherworld.[34] There is also evidence of a custom of making special pastry[35] which resembled bridges[36] enabling the souls of the dead to pass to the 'other side'. The assumption that the road to the Slavic Otherworld leads through water[37] also finds considerable support in archaeological materials from Poland, and these will be examined in further detail below.

2.4 One Otherworld or more? Preliminary conclusions

The wide variety of terms used to describe the Otherworld(s), such as *Nawia*, *Wyraj*, *Raj*, *Irij*, may either reflect the existence of several different realms of the dead or perhaps regional differences in how one and the same otherworldly place was named among various peoples. Unfortunately, the sources available to us today lack specific details regarding the actual journey to the Otherworld(s), and we may only assume that it could be reached by the souls of the dead and certain types of animals, such as snakes or birds (we may perhaps speculate that these animals were also some

30 Szyjewski 2003, p. 78.
31 On *Wyraj*, *Raj*, *Irij*, see also Kajkowski 2015, p. 271. According to Bylina (1992, p. 15), another term which also refers to the Otherworld, but which is found only in Russian sources, is *nevedomaja strana* ('the unknown side/place'). On this notion, see Teterycz-Puzio 2009, p. 213.
32 Szyjewski 2003, p. 77.
33 Kajkowski 2015, pp. 271–277.
34 Kajkowski 2015, p. 272.
35 Kajkowski 2015, p. 272.
36 On the symbolism of bridges among the Slavs, see, for example, Bylina 2012; Chudziak 2015, p. 41.
37 On the symbolic meanings of waterways and islands among Pomeranian Slavs, see, for example, Buko 2011, pp. 312 ff.; Chudziak 2015.

incarnation of the human soul). As regards the gods who presided over these otherworldly domains, we can only list Nyja and perhaps the god Triglav. The latter, known as Weles in East Slavic sources, is sometimes described as a guardian of the Otherworld.[38]

Due to the scarcity of textual evidence, scholars tend to build the picture of the Slavic Otherworld(s) by drawing on and combining examples from different time periods and territories. Such an approach may lead to the assumption that some kind of coherent, or even orthodox, world view existed among the early Slavs. However, recent works on other early medieval societies, for example those of Viking Age Scandinavians, demonstrate that pre-Christian beliefs varied considerably on both macro and micro-scale. A good example is a thought-provoking study by Jens Peter Schjødt[39] who has recently observed that Old Norse beliefs display several types of diversity: chronological, geographical, social and cognitive. This diversity of beliefs and ritual practices is probably also an inherent feature of Slavic paganism. Similarly to the Scandinavians, the Slavs may have worshipped different gods or imagined their Otherworld(s) in various ways, depending on the region, period in time and individual preferences (also in relation to social status – i.e. different gods for members of different social strata). Nevertheless, despite this assumed diversity in pagan beliefs, I think it is still possible to trace some more general patterns. These patterns may potentially be reflected in archaeological materials to which we shall now turn.

3 Iconographic representations of the Slavic cosmos?

Having discussed the textual sources (and remembering how problematic they often are), we can now explore potential hints regarding Slavic conceptions of the Otherworld(s) in the available material evidence from the early Middle Ages. In the opinion of some scholars, there exists a range of archaeological finds (especially from the area of Poland and Polabia, but also from the territory of contemporary Ukraine) that could shed light on how the early medieval Slavs imagined their cosmos. Let us briefly examine the most evocative examples and begin with the so-called 'Svantevit from Zbrucz'.

3.1 The Zbrucz statue or the so-called 'Svantevit from Zbrucz'

The Zbrucz statue, also known as 'Svantevit from Zbrucz' (in Polish *Światowid ze Zbrucza*), is probably the most iconic find commonly (but not exclusively) associated

38 On Weles in East Slavic sources, see the important work of Uspeński 1985.
39 Schjødt 2009.

Fig. 1: The Zbrucz statue or the so-called 'Svantevit from Zbrucz' (*Światowid ze Zbrucza*). The enlarged detail on the left shows one of sides of the statue with an anthropomorphic figure. In the upper right corner is another miniature character, sometimes interpreted as a representation of the human soul. Collections of the Archaeological Museum in Kraków. Photo by Leszek Gardeła.

with pagan beliefs of the early medieval Slavs.[40] The statue was discovered by accident in 1848 in the River Zbrucz (currently in Ukraine) and soon afterwards transported to Kraków where it is still kept today at the Museum of Archaeology (Fig. 1).[41] The statue stands 2.57 m tall and is almost square in cross-section (the width of its sides ranges from 29 to 32 cm).[42] Each of the four sides of the statue is decorated with carved anthropomorphic motifs and divided into three vertically aligned tiers. Four sides of the uppermost tier represent tall standing figures with arms bent at the elbows, four sides of the middle tier show anthropomorphic figures with stretched

40 Among the classic works on the 'Svantevit from Zbrucz' are, for example, Hadaczek 1904; Reyman 1933; Leńczyk 1964; Leńczyk 1965; Słupecki 1993, pp. 59–62; Szymański 1996. See also Kozłowski 1964 for technological analyses of the statue.

41 The history of the statue's discovery is best described in the work of Leńczyk 1965.

42 The measurements provided here are based on the work of Leńczyk 1964.

arms, and three sides of the lowest tier have a carved anthropomorphic figure with raised arms (as if it was holding the tiers above). It is noteworthy that the figures shown in the uppermost part of the statue (all of which seem to share one head with four faces covered by a characteristic 'hat') have different 'attributes' – one is holding a horn and another a ring/disc/[43]cup.[44] The figure with the horn is also accompanied by a representation of a horse with a sheathed saber above it. Based on its various features, the Zbrucz statue is often dated to around the tenth century.[45]

Since the moment of its discovery it has been argued that the statue from Zbrucz represents the god Svantevit, one of the main deities of the Slavs with warlike characteristics.[46] This interpretation is predominantly based on its iconography and especially the four anthropomorphic faces in its upper part, each looking in a different direction. According to the Danish chronicler Saxo Grammaticus (Book XIV, ch. 39),[47] a four-headed wooden statue of the god Svantevit stood in the pagan temple of the Polabian Slavs in Arkona – it is this account that has led scholars to believe that the find from Zbrucz, although made from limestone, represents the same deity. In this context, it is noteworthy that in more recent times small wooden figures or tool-handles with several anthropomorphic heads have also been discovered in different parts of Poland, Denmark and Sweden (Fig. 2). Similarly to the find from Zbrucz, they are often regarded as representations of Svantevit.[48] Although some scholars have argued that the multi-headed figures should be connected with the Scandinavian cultural milieu,[49] it has recently been shown that such views do not find solid support.[50]

Over the years the Zbrucz statue has attracted unparalleled scholarly interest and has been debated in numerous publications on Slavic mythology in Poland and elsewhere in Europe and beyond. The idea that it represents the god Svantevit was expressed soon after its discovery.[51] However, alternative views have also been discussed, for example linking it with the beliefs of nomadic tribes.[52] Several years ago, two Ukrainian scholars published an interesting study in which they suggested the possibility that the statue could be a fake and a product of nineteenth-century

43 The 'disc' interpretation is provided by Łapiński 1984, p. 137.

44 The 'cup' interpretation is provided by Hadaczek 1904, p. 117.

45 But see critical discussion in Łapiński 1984, pp. 130 f.

46 On Svantevit see, for example, Urbańczyk 1991, pp. 65–71; Szyjewski 2003, pp. 116 ff.; Gieysztor 2006, pp. 117–130.

47 The classic edition of Saxo Grammaticus is by Olrik / Ræder (ed.) 1931. For a Polish translation of this account, see Labuda 2003, p. 178–181. For an English edition and translation, see Friis-Jensen / Fisher (ed./transl.) 2015.

48 See discussion on these figures in Filipowiak 1986, p. 26; Lamm 1987; Filipowiak 1993, p. 29; Gardeła 2014, pp. 92–98; Kajkowski / Szczepanik 2013; Kajkowski 2014, pp. 222 f.

49 See, for example, Duczko 2000, p. 39; Stanisławski 2013, pp. 133 f., 204–207.

50 Gardeła 2014, pp. 92–98.

51 Reyman 1933, p. 4; Leńczyk 1964, p. 28; Hensel 1983, p. 119.

52 Wawrzeniecki 1929; Szafrański 1995.

Fig. 2: A small wooden figure from Wolin interpreted as a representation of Svantevit. Collections of the Centre for Medieval Archaeology of the Baltic Region / Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology Polish Academy of Sciences. Photo by Leszek Gardeła.

fascination with Slavic antiquities.[53] This controversial idea is currently hotly debated in Polish and international scholarship and will be critically explored in further detail within the frameworks of an interdisciplinary project aiming to investigate the wider context and meaning of the Zbrucz statue.[54] Although the problem of the statue's cultural origin and authenticity still remains a matter of discussion, the present study assumes that it is a product of early medieval Slavs. It will therefore be examined and described in the context of their beliefs.

The upper tier of the statue is often believed to be a representation of Svantevit.[55] The horse and saber are interpreted as attributes that highlight the god's warlike character. The presence of a horn also matches the description of Svantevit provided by the chronicler Saxo Grammaticus.[56] Interestingly, Tadeusz Reyman[57] has suggested that since the figure on the side with the horse has not been shown with legs, it may be interpreted as 'sitting' on the animal. However, it is also noteworthy

53 Komar / Chamajko 2013.

54 The project will be undertaken by a group of scholars from the University of Rzeszów and the Museum of Archaeology in Kraków.

55 Reyman 1933, pp. 11 f.

56 On the account of Saxo Grammaticus and the Zbrucz statue, see Hensel 1983.

57 Reyman 1933, p. 12.

that some scholars consider two of the four anthropomorphic figures shown in the upper tier as females.[58] The four anthropomorphic characters (one on each side of the statue) shown *en face* in the middle tier are regarded as dancing[59] (as indicated by their thumbs pointing downwards, implying that they may be 'holding hands'). Two of them appear to be women, as implied by their clearly visible breasts. This tier is usually considered as referring to the human world. Interestingly, near the head of one of the figures is a representation of an identical figure, but in miniature (Fig. 1). This intriguing detail, hardly visible today, is sometimes interpreted as depicting a child,[60] or even the human soul. The figures shown on the lowest tier are collectively regarded as a representation of the chthonic god Triglav/Weles, who in textual sources is described as having three heads.[61] This identification is particularly substantiated by the fact that only three figures are shown on the sides of the lowest tier of the statue (i.e. they have three heads in total), a part which could be interpreted as referring to the underworld.

Previous scholars saw the Zbrucz statue as reflecting "a complex cosmological programme" or "a philosophical treatise carved in stone".[62] However, Adam Łapiński has critically observed that the methods and ideological premises of those who dealt with this object in their research have led to the situation in which, after over 130 years of study, we can only say with certainty that the Zbrucz statue "is old and displays numerous associations with different cultures".[63] While its interpretations could certainly be further expanded and nuanced, in general it may be argued that the Zbrucz statue indeed appears to be a model[64] of the pagan universe and/or social or divine order. Despite some methodological concerns, I agree with those scholars who regard the figure in its upper tier as a sky god (e.g. Svantevit or its East Slavic equivalent, Perun), the figures in the central part as humans, and the three-headed character in the lowest tier as a chthonic god (e.g. Triglav/Weles). The Zbrucz statue is certainly a unique object, and although a range of other anthropomorphic stone sculptures have been found in the Slavic area, it is the only one that contains so many iconographical details. In addition to stone sculptures potentially representing pre-Christian gods or perhaps heroes and ancestors,[65] a range of wooden statues have also been discovered in the area of Polabia and elsewhere in the Slavic world.[66] These anthropomorphic wooden statues, similar to the stone sculptures, are

58 See, for example, Łapiński 1984, p. 129.
59 The dance interpretation was first proposed by Hadaczek 1904, p. 118; see also Reyman 1933, p. 10; Rybakov 1951, p. 415.
60 Reyman 1933, pp. 10 f.
61 Reyman 1933, p. 9; Rybakov 1951, p. 415.
62 See Łapiński 1984, pp. 130 ff. for an overview.
63 Łapiński 1984, p. 132.
64 Further discussions on the Zbrucz statue as a model of the universe may be found in Łapiński 1984.
65 On stone statues see, for example, Gieysztor 2006, pp. 230–241.
66 Słupecki 1993.

often linked with the sphere of Slavic beliefs, but none of them are as elaborate as the find from Zbrucz. Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that similar 'models of the universe' to that shown on the Zbrucz find are also represented on other categories of objects from the West Slavic area – namely a range of knife sheaths with zoomorphic and anthropomorphic decorations. It is to these artefacts that we shall now turn our attention.

3.2 Knife sheaths with zoomorphic and anthropomorphic decorations

Excavations at a number of early medieval sites in Poland have brought to light a very interesting group of objects in the form of leather sheaths with zoomorphic and anthropomorphic decorations. These sheaths are relatively rare finds, and they seem to have been priced possessions – they are ornamented with riveted sheets of copper alloy foil overlaid by an additional copper alloy bar. The copper alloy bar usually terminates with a representation of an animal head, probably that of a snake. Occasionally, as in the case of sheaths from Brześć Kujawski and Ostrów Lednicki (Fig. 3), the other end of the bar has a representation of an anthropomorphic figure. So far, sheaths of this type (or their fragments) have been found at the following sites in Poland: Bodzia (Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship);[67] Brzeg (Łódź Voivodeship);[68] Brześć Kujawski (Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship);[69] Ciepłe (Pomeranian Voivodeship);[70] Dębina (Łódź Voivodeship);[71] Dziekanowice (Greater Poland Voivodeship);[72] Giecz (Greater Poland Voivodeship);[73] Kałdus (Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship);[74] Łączyno Stare (Masovian Voivodeship);[75] Ostrów Lednicki (Greater Poland Voivodeship);[76] Poddębice (Łódź Voivodeship);[77] Psary (Łódź Voivodeship);[78] Sowinki (Greater

67 Kowalska 2013, pp. 284–287.
68 Kufel-Dzierzgowska 1983, plates X, XVI.
69 Kaszewscy 1971, p. 389; Szczepanik 2010, pp. 32 f.
70 Ratajczyk 2013b, p. 333.
71 Pokuta / Wojda 1979, plate X.
72 Szczepanik 2010, p. 38.
73 Gardeła 2016, p. 164; Gardeła 2017, p. 60.
74 Chudziak 2001, pp. 69, 79; Szczepanik 2010, pp. 35 f.
75 Rauhut / Długopolska 1973, plate VI.
76 Szczepanik 2010, pp. 33 ff.
77 Wiklak 1960, plate XLVIII.
78 Trębaczkiewicz 1963, plate XVIII.

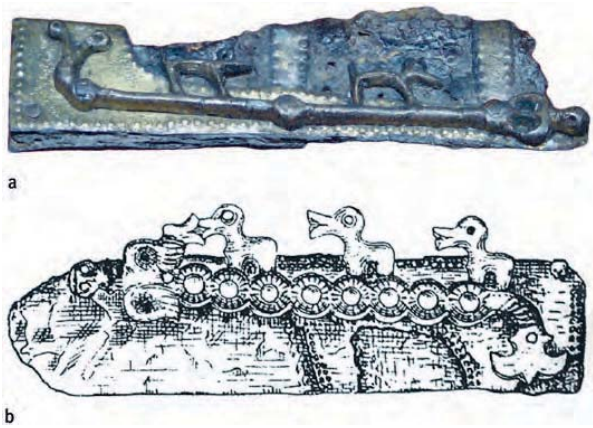

Fig. 3: Knife scabbards from Ostrów Lednicki (a) and Brześć Kujawski (b) with anthropomorphic and zoomorphic motifs. Photo by Leszek Gardeła. Drawing reproduced after Kaszewscy 1971, p. 389.

Poland Voivodeship);[79] Tomice (Lower Silesian Voivodeship);[80] Wolin Młynówka (Western Pomeranian Voivodeship).[81]

Over the last decade or so, there has been an increased interest in this group of finds which has also given rise to some controversies. The sheaths found in the early medieval cemetery at Kałdus, for example, have been interpreted as ornamented in the Mammen style,[82] and consequently this opinion has led to associating them with Viking Age Scandinavians. This interpretation, although accepted by several scholars, is in my view completely unsubstantiated. The decorations of the sheaths, especially the zoomorphic motifs, are not at all similar to the Mammen style and have no direct parallels in *any* archaeological finds from Northern Europe. I have discussed this problem more extensively in a different article,[83] dismissing the previous arguments on their Scandinavian provenance and arguing for their origin in the West Slavic area.

Two interesting studies on sheaths with zoomorphic and anthropomorphic decorations have recently been published by Paweł Szczepanik,[84] who has interpreted their meanings in the context of Slavic pre-Christian beliefs. Drawing on earlier work

79 Krzyszowski 1995, p. 67; Szczepanik 2010, pp. 36 ff.
80 Wachowski 1975, p. 201; Szczepanik 2010, pp. 37 f.
81 Wojtasik 1970, Table II.
82 Chudziak 2001, pp. 69 f., 78 f., 89; Chudziak 2002, p. 438.
83 Gardeła 2016.
84 Szczepanik 2010.

of Ingo Gabriel,[85] who considers an analogous sheath from Oldenburg in Germany as a model of the Slavic cosmos, Szczepanik has applied similar ideas to the sheaths from Poland. His interpretation of these objects is based on two main premises and assumptions:

- A tri-partite division of the Slavic cosmos[86] – Szczepanik sees evidence for this idea in the aforementioned account of Ebbo who described the god Triglav in Szczecin and his rule over three realms: sky/heaven, earth and the underworld. As suggested above, it is probable that also the Zbrucz statue represents a tripartite model of the Slavic universe.
- The dualistic nature of Slavic cosmogonic myths (i.e. good – evil, order – chaos, sky/heaven – underworld etc.) and the existence of two major gods with opposing characteristics, Svantevit/Perun and Triglav/Weles.

While it is not possible to examine and thoroughly discuss Szczepanik's ideas here, it should suffice to say that he perceives the animal head (snake or dragon) depicted at the end of each sheath as a representation of the chthonic god Triglav/Weles (responsible for the underworld), and the anthropomorphic representation on the opposite end as Perun (responsible for the sky and thunder). As such, in a visual form, the sheaths demonstrate the dualistic opposition between the two gods, and the bar itself can be understood as an axis (i.e. *axis mundi*) on which the different worlds (sky/heaven, earth and underworld) under their rule are aligned. In Szczepanik's view, the additional animals along the axis (interpreted as horses or cattle in the case of the finds from Oldenburg and Ostrów Lednicki and as birds[87] in the case of the sheath from Brześć Kujawski) shown on some of the fittings can be regarded as mediatory creatures which enable communication between humans and their gods. It is remarkable that the iconographic programme and the arrangement of the zoomorphic motifs on some of these sheaths (especially on the most elaborate ones from Brześć Kujawski, Ostrów Lednicki and on the fitting from Oldenburg) closely parallel the imagery on the Zbrucz statue.[88] Is this a mere coincidence or does it prove the existence of some universal conception of the cosmos among the Slavs in Central Europe? The solution to this problem still requires further studies, but the iconographic resemblance is indeed striking and should be seriously considered.

85 Gabriel 2000, p. 139.

86 Szczepanik 2010, p. 28.

87 If the animals on the scabbard from Brześć Kujawski are really birds (geese?), then perhaps they could be regarded as representing human souls? In his study of Slavic beliefs, Gieysztor (2006, p. 143) mentioned an intriguing story from some Czech source (the name of which is, unfortunately, not provided in Gieysztor's book) confirming that the dead may have flown to the Otherworld in bird shape. The story tells of a man who was unhappy in his marriage. He has a dream in which his wife transforms into a goose and flies 'somewhere beyond the sea to Weles' and never returns.

88 Szczepanik 2010, pp. 30 f.

3.3 Copper alloy zoomorphic spurs

There is one more intriguing category of finds from early medieval Poland whose meaning-content could relate to Slavic ideas about the cosmos and the Otherworld. The finds in question are copper alloy spurs with zoomorphic decorations. They are known from several rather broadly distributed archaeological sites in Poland including Cerkiewnik (Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship), Ciepłe (Pomeranian Voivodeship), Lutomiersk (Łódź Voivodeship) and Wrocław-Ostrów Tumski (Lower Silesian Voivodeship). It is noteworthy that detached goads of spurs of exactly the same type have recently been found at Lubniewice in the vicinity of Gorzów Wielkopolski (Lubuskie Voivodeship)[89] as well as at Skegrie in Skåne (Sweden)[90] and Kumachevo (Sambian peninsula).[91] Let us briefly examine the overall appearance of the zoomorphic spurs and the possible meaning of their iconographic programme. We will begin with their first and most puzzling examples from the cemetery at Lutomiersk in Central Poland.

The excavations in the cemetery at Lutomiersk[92] began in the 1940s under the German occupation, and after the Second World War they were continued by Polish archaeologists. Overall, the cemetery probably comprised around 150 graves, many of which were lavishly furnished male burials with different kinds of weapons and equestrian equipment, while the female burials contained silver jewellery of distinctively Slavic type. The copper alloy spurs with zoomorphic motifs were found in graves 5 and 10. Interestingly, grave 5 was a cremation, while grave 10 was an inhumation. Each of the two graves contained a complete set of two spurs in addition to weapons and other elements of horse tack. It is noteworthy that in grave 5 the spurs were found in the context of bundled up leather remains, previously interpreted as a saddle – this led the original excavators to assume that the spurs had actually served as saddle mounts.[93] All four copper alloy spurs from Lutomiersk look very similar (although specialist analyses which could determine if they were made from the same mould have not been conducted yet) (Fig. 4). Along the upper edge of their arms is a row of (walking) animals resembling horned cattle.[94] Three such figures are represented on each arm of the spurs (although not all of them are completely preserved today). The arms of the spurs terminate with an animal head resembling the head of a snake. Each arm has a recess inside, and the back of the snake at the end of each arm has

89 Ratajczyk / Gardeła / Kajkowski 2017; Michalak / Gardeła 2019.
90 Söderberg 2014, pp. 76 ff; Gardeła / Kajkowski / Söderberg 2019.
91 Wadyl / Skvorcov 2018.
92 On the cemetery at Lutomiersk, see, for example, Jażdżewski 1951; Jażdżewski 1952; Nadolski / Abramowicz / Poklewski (ed.) 1959. See also latest discussions in Gardeła 2014, pp. 38–43; Grygiel 2014; Gardeła 2018; Gardeła / Kajkowski / Ratajczyk 2019.
93 Nadolski 1959, pp. 57 ff.; but see reinterpretations in Wachowski 2006; Ratajczyk 2013a; Grygiel 2014, pp. 707 f, 713.
94 While I regard these animals as cattle, other scholars see them as 'horses with halos' (in Polish *koniki w aureoli*) – see, for example, Ratajczyk 2013a, p. 295.

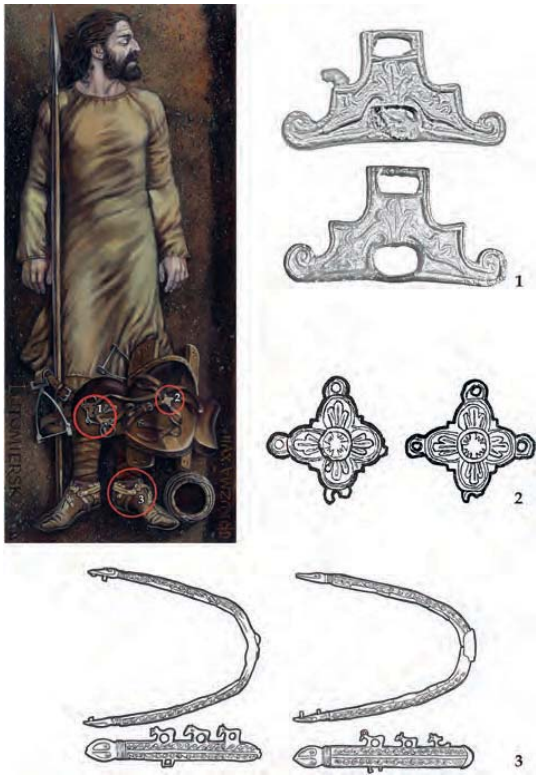

Fig. 4: Grave 10 from the early medieval cemetery at Lutomiersk in Central Poland. 1 – two copper alloy cheek pieces with a decorative motif probably representing two flying serpents; 2 – decorated bridle mounts; 3 – two copper alloy spurs with zoomorphic motifs. Artistic reconstruction by Mirosław Kuźma. Finds redrawn by Karolina Michałowska after Grygiel 2014, p. 715 and Nadolski / Abramowicz / Poklewski 1959, plates XLIV and LIV.

small rivets – probably to attach a leather strap to hold them in place on the rider's feet. An interesting feature of the Lutomiersk spurs is that their goads are missing which makes them ineffective while riding a horse. Therefore, in their current form, they could not be used as spurs *per se*. Nevertheless, judging by their overall appearance, it is clear that they were originally intended as spurs and perhaps later (as a result of wear and damage?) reused to serve as saddle mounts.[95] Alternatively, we may speculate that the removal of the spurs' goads was an intentional act that had some

95 Note that the idea of reusing the Lutomiersk spurs as saddle mounts is only plausible in the case of grave 5 where the remains of leather were found in direct contact with the spurs.

special ritual purpose during the funerary ceremonies. It may also be speculated that the spurs were intended for the journey to the Otherworld, although it is noteworthy that no horses were buried with the dead at Lutomiersk.

As mentioned above, similarly made spurs (or their fragments) are also known from four other sites located in different areas of Poland, such as Cerkiewnik,[96] Ciepłe,[97] Wrocław-Ostrów Tumski[98] and the vicinity of Gorzów Wielkopolski.[99] Unfortunately, the spurs from Cerkiewnik and Wrocław-Ostrów Tumski are only fragmentarily preserved, which hampers their more detailed analysis. However, the spurs recently found at Ciepłe, in a lavishly equipped chamber grave 42/2009, are excellently preserved. Interestingly, it seems that the deceased man was actually buried with these spurs on his feet[100] (which could also, perhaps, tell us something about the manner of his journey to the Otherworld). In addition, he also had a bucket, a spear and a sword. The bronze spurs from Ciepłe are particularly remarkable because – in contrast to their parallels from other sites – they are complete and have well preserved goads. The goads of the Ciepłe spurs reveal an important detail – they have a zoomorphic decoration in the form of a three-dimensional horse with its head turned towards the back. In addition to that, on the lower edge of the spurs' arms there are small loops with suspended bronze bells. Although some scholars have suggested Western, Eastern or Northern European provenance of the spurs, the overall decoration, as well as the nature of their iconographic programme, strongly suggests that the spurs are actually West Slavic products, most likely from the area of Poland.

The main premise which allows to classify the spurs from Cerkiewnik, Ciepłe, Lutomiersk and Wrocław-Ostrów Tumski as West Slavic products lies in the fact that their zoomorphic decorations very closely resemble those that can be seen on the knife sheaths examined above. Moreover, I would argue that the spurs express a similar iconographic programme to that shown on the knives – the snake heads on the terminals could represent the chthonic god Triglav/Weles, while the animals (horned cattle) may be understood as human souls or animal mediators who travel between the different worlds. The meaning of the horse with its head turned towards its back (on the goads of the spurs from Ciepłe) is more difficult to unravel, but horses in Slavic beliefs were very important creatures closely associated with the idea of prophecy and with pagan gods such as Svantevit or Triglav/Weles.[101] Alternatively, this horse could perhaps represent the creature that carried the souls of the dead to the otherworld.

96 Ziemlińska-Odoj 1992.

97 Rataczyk 2013a.

98 Kaźmierczyk / Lasota 1979.

99 Ratajczyk / Gardeła / Kajkowski 2017.

100 Ratajczyk 2013a, p. 291.

101 On the meaning of horses in Slavic and Scandinavian beliefs, see the latest work of Łukaszyk 2012 with further references. See also Gapski 2014 for a general overview of the significance of horses in medieval Poland.

3.4 Iconographic representations of the Slavic cosmos. Conclusions

In conclusion, I would argue that a careful interpretation of the archaeological finds examined above – including the Zbrucz statue, knife sheaths and spurs – allows to see within them some allusions to how the early medieval Slavs imagined their cosmos. Based on my analysis of these objects, a hypothesis can be posed that they represent the alignment of three different realms on a vertical *axis mundi*. The world above is the domain of the sky god (e.g. Svantevit/Perun), the middle world belongs to humans, and the underworld is ruled over by a chthonic deity (e.g. Triglav/Weles, sometimes represented as a snake – as in the case of the knife sheath fittings and terminals of the copper alloy spurs). The animals shown on the knife scabbards and spurs can perhaps be regarded as animal mediators between the worlds (horses) or as representations of human souls (as we have seen above, these are sometimes imagined as birds or cattle). Of course, these views are just preliminary hypotheses, and they can (and should) be subject to further debate.

Having now examined the textual sources that provide hints regarding the Slavic Otherworld(s), and some potential iconographic representations of the Slavic cosmos, we can move further in our analysis and explore their eschatological beliefs based on funerary evidence. In order to do so, we shall take a closer look at inhumation graves of early medieval Slavs from the period between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, a time when in various parts of Poland old beliefs were gradually giving way to a new Christian religion.

4 Early medieval funerary archaeology in Poland. An overview

Funerary archaeology plays a major role in examining past approaches to the dying and the dead. Excavations in cemeteries may be particularly valuable for understanding the world views of societies which did not leave any vernacular writing, such as the Western Slavs who inhabited the area of Poland in the early Middle Ages. Studies of early medieval cemeteries have been playing an important role in Polish archaeology since the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century,[102] and now a broad academic literature on this subject is available. This section will briefly present the past and present trends and trajectories in early medieval funerary archaeology in Poland and will explore the potential which the grave finds may hold for studies of Slavic eschatological beliefs.

102 See discussion on these early studies in Rajewski 1937, pp. 28–29.

4.1 Funerary practices in early medieval Poland between the tenth and thirteenth centuries. An overview of research history

The first overviews of funerary practices of the early medieval Slavs in Poland began to appear in the early twentieth century. In this section, we shall take a closer look at the major turning points in this field of study.

In 1930, Władysław Łęga wrote an extensive monograph focusing on Pomerania in the early Middle Ages, which included some passages related to funerary practices in that area.[103] Seven years later, Zdzisław Rajewski[104] published a detailed synthesis of early medieval inhumation cemeteries from Greater Poland, and today his study is listed among classic works on these issues. Looking at it from contemporary perspective, it appears remarkably 'modern' and thorough for its time. Rajewski's work was based on a thorough assessment of archival materials and private antiquarian collections, press notices and a range of professional archaeological publications. It also included the results of excavations in early medieval cemeteries conducted by Rajewski himself. The first part of his work was mostly empirical and descriptive,[105] listing the sites by name and providing basic information about the number of graves, their external and internal structure and furnishings. In some instances Rajewski was able to provide details regarding the position in which the bodies lay in the graves and also the location of various objects that accompanied them. It seems, however, that the biological sex of the deceased was assessed mostly on the basis of the items buried with the dead (e.g. weapons indicated men and jewellery indicated women) and not necessarily on anthropological analyses of the osteological materials. In the second part of his study,[106] Rajewski discussed the different objects from cemeteries discovered in Greater Poland, but the main focus of his work was on their functional aspects. Nevertheless, on some occasions he did allow himself to speculate about their possible symbolic meanings. He also examined the location of the graves in the landscape as well as their size and various external and internal features, observing that in the majority of instances the graves were aligned in rows. It is clear from Rajewski's study that the cemeteries in the studied area were generally located on fields or small hills, but some were also found on islands or peninsulas.[107] He concluded that early medieval cemeteries in Greater Poland were usually established in places that had not been used by previous (e.g. prehistoric) societies, but in a few cases traces of re-use of older cemeteries have also been noted.[108] Among the objects

103 Łęga 1930.
104 Rajewski 1937.
105 Rajewski 1937, pp. 28–48.
106 Rajewski 1937, pp. 49–85.
107 Rajewski 1937, p. 50.
108 Rajewski 1937, p. 51.

that accompanied the dead were jewellery, clay pottery, wooden buckets and occasionally weapons, in addition to various tools and small utensils.

Another important study which focused on early medieval funerary archaeology in Poland and which sought to embrace the archaeological materials from the whole remit of the country (not just a particular region, as in the case of Władysław Łęga's and Zdzisław Rajewski's works) was published in 1969 by Maria Miśkiewicz.[109] Her article, however, only focused on inhumation graves, leaving aside cremation burials which were examined in detail by Helena Zoll-Adamikowa several years later.[110] The chronological scope of Miśkiewicz's work included graves from 62 cemeteries that dated between the tenth and thirteenth centuries.[111] She critically observed that the quality of earlier publications was varied and that some of the archival cemetery reports were incomplete or lacked important details. The rudimentary style of earlier publications still remains a problem today when we want to use these archival materials for more advanced and nuanced analyses. It is vital to note that, contrary to her predecessors, Miśkiewicz[112] seems to have expressed far greater interest in examining the symbolic meanings of different funerary procedures and the objects buried with the deceased. Most importantly, Miśkiewicz[113] explicitly showed the diversity of funerary practices in the area of Poland by paying attention to both the external and internal structures of the graves. In her analysis she listed graves with different variants of internal and external stone settings, graves with wooden constructions and ordinary pit graves. Miśkiewicz also observed that some of the dead were buried in wooden coffins, occasionally made with the use of nails or iron fittings. The general conclusion that arises from her study is that most inhumation graves discovered in the area of Poland were single graves, but burials of two or more individuals are also occasionally encountered.[114] Empty graves, or cenotaphs, have also been noted at some sites.[115] In the early medieval cemeteries in Poland, the dead were usually laid in their graves in a supine position (albeit with various alignments of the upper limbs), but the studies of Miśkiewicz and other scholars have shown that other variants also occur. For example, some individuals are interred prone[116] or on the side (sometimes with flexed legs), and there are instances of binding the bodies with rope or burying them in shrouds.[117] Only two years after the release of Miśkiewicz's

109 Miśkiewicz 1969.
110 Zoll-Adamikowa 1975; Zoll-Adamikowa 1979.
111 Miśkiewicz 1969, p. 242.
112 Miśkiewicz 1969, pp. 244–245.
113 Miśkiewicz 1969, p. 246.
114 Miśkiewicz 1969, pp. 246–247. For a recent reevaluation of double graves in early medieval Poland, see Gardeła / Kajkowski 2014.
115 Miśkiewicz 1969, p. 247.
116 For a discussion on prone burials from early medieval Poland, see Gardeła 2011; Gardeła 2012; Gardeła 2017.
117 Miśkiewicz 1969, p. 247.

article, a detailed analysis of early medieval cemeteries from the area of Masovia and Podlachia was published by Lechosław Rauhut.[118] His study has shown that among the characteristic features of burials in these areas was the presence of stones in the graves' external and internal structures. Furthermore, many of the graves contained relatively rich grave goods in the form of weapons (in male burials) and jewellery (in female burials). Additionally, the graves from Masovia and Podlachia also included other items such as pottery, wooden buckets, knives, spindle whorls, strike-a-lights and various small utensils.

In 1975, Krzysztof Wachowski published a monograph in which he collected and analyzed the archaeological materials from early medieval cemeteries from the region of Silesia – his study significantly complemented the earlier work of Maria Miśkiewicz where Silesian materials had been treated marginally. Apart from listing all known cemeteries from Silesia, Wachowski's work assessed their spatial arrangements and the grave goods that accompanied the deceased. In the traditional spirit of his time, he also provided some remarks on how funerary evidence could be used in studies of social structure. It is important to note, however, that Wachowski also attempted to set the Silesian cemeteries against a wider, comparative background. This was possible thanks to previous publications of early medieval cemeteries from other parts of Poland. In general, the Silesian cemeteries included mostly single graves (with very occasional cases of double burials[119]) with the dead buried supine and oriented east-west. The average number of graves in a cemetery in that region of Poland ranged between 150 and 200, and the graves were usually aligned in rows (for example in Greater Poland).[120] Some of the deceased were buried in coffins, and a few graves contained stones in their internal and external constructions.[121] Among the grave goods were various objects such as jewellery, shells, bronze bells, coins, whetstones, wooden buckets, clay vessels, and occasionally weapons and other things.[122]

The studies of the above-mentioned scholars like Władysław Łęga, Zdzisław Rajewski, Maria Miśkiewicz, Helena Zoll-Adamikowa, Lechosław Rauhut and Krzysztof Wachowski are now regarded as classic works in the field of early medieval funerary archaeology in Poland. Although some of their interpretations require revisions, they are still frequently quoted today. Since the 1970s numerous cemetery reports and shorter studies on funerary practices in early medieval Poland have been written. It is, of course, impossible to list them all here, but we may note some of the more important analytical works, overviews and edited volumes such as those recently published

118 Rauhut 1971.
119 Wachowski 1975, p. 70.
120 Wachowski 1975, p. 70.
121 Wachowski 1975, p. 76.
122 Wachowski 1975, pp. 35–60, 72.

by Marian Rębkowski,[123] Andrzej Buko,[124] Sylwia Cygan, Marcin Glinianowicz, Piotr Kotowicz[125] and others. Valuable studies of funerary practices in early medieval Poland are also regularly presented in the series entitled *Funeralia Lednickie* which contains papers from annual conferences on mortuary archaeology organized at Lednica in Greater Poland.[126]

Despite a significant increase in the discoveries of early medieval cemeteries and numerous excavation reports that have been published since the 1960–1970s, we unfortunately still lack a thorough and up-to-date overview of early medieval funerary practices in Poland. Ideally, such a synthesis should engage with the available material in a modern way, especially by incorporating recent advancements in archaeological theory and natural sciences. The sections below will present some new ways of interpreting funerary materials from the area of early medieval Poland, and I will also attempt to examine whether a more nuanced approach to these sources could provide further hints about the Slavic journeys to the Otherworld.

5 Slavic funerals: performance and meaning

The vast majority of past and recent studies discussing early medieval graves in Poland have focused predominantly on the empirical presentation of archaeological data as well as its typological and chronological classification.[127] As we have seen above, the available publications include details on the spatial arrangement of cemeteries, the location of particular graves as well as their external and internal structures and contents (i.e. cremated or uncremated remains and goods that accompany them). Despite significant advancements in archaeological theory in Western and Northern Europe, in Polish scholarship there is still a prevailing tendency to regard graves and their furnishings as 'mirrors of life' directly reflecting the status and profession which the deceased had in life. In this perspective, graves with weapons and/or equestrian equipment are frequently regarded as belonging to 'warriors'[128] or 'horse riders', and lavishly equipped female graves are sometimes seen as those of 'princesses'. Moreover, when osteological analyses are unavailable or impossible to perform due to the lack of skeletal material, the sex (and sometimes even the age)

123 Rębkowski 2007, pp. 89–161.
124 Buko 2011, pp. 377–413.
125 Cygan / Glinianowicz / Kotowicz (ed.) 2011.
126 See, for example, the latest volumes in the *Funeralia Lednickie* series which explore issues of ethnicity and identity in funerary archaeology – Dzieduszycki / Wrzesiński (ed.) 2011; Dzieduszycki / Wrzesiński (ed.) 2012; Dzieduszycki / Wrzesiński (ed.) 2014.
127 See valuable critique in Skrzyńska 2005.
128 See discussion in Janowski / Kurasiński 2008, pp. 61, 66, 68; see critique in Skrzyńska 2005.

of the deceased is usually inferred on the basis of accompanying objects – weapons are seen as indicators of men, jewellery of women.[129] This manner of analyzing and presenting funerary evidence has largely overshadowed other important aspects associated with past burials, especially those related to time, motion, space and symbolism. Post-processual approaches to early medieval graves in Poland have only recently started to be applied on a wider scale, but these advancements are still in their early stages.[130]

Despite the fact that early medieval burial practices in Poland have been debated in academic literature for over a century, there has been very little discussion on how funerals were planned, orchestrated and performed.[131] In this section, I hope to shed some new light on these notions by referring to selected archaeological evidence from inhumation cemeteries dating between the tenth and thirteenth centuries in Poland. The different stages of mortuary practices examined below can be regarded, in a practical and also metaphorical sense, as rites of passage and integral elements of the journey to the Otherworld.

5.1 The moment of death

The early medieval Slavs could meet their death in various circumstances. For example, they could pass away from old age, illness, unfortunate accidents or from wounds in battle. Most people probably died in their homes, but death could also come in the open air (e.g. during a longer journey). Some individuals, however, may have died what can be regarded a 'bad death' resulting from suicide, murder or other unusual events (e.g. drowning, fire etc.), and these special circumstances could potentially influence the treatment of their bodies at the funeral. Archaeological evidence from the area of early medieval Poland clearly displays the existence of 'deviant' funerary rites which may have been intended to prevent the dead from returning to the world of the living. This is suggested, for example, by burials in prone position (i.e. face down) or with large stones placed directly on the cadavers.[132] In general, the osteological evidence from early medieval cemeteries in Poland implies that the average age of death in this part of Europe ranged between 30 and 40 years.

129 On the dangers of such uncritical approaches, see Skrzyńska 2005.

130 See, for example, the important recent work of Sikora 2012a; Sikora 2012b; Sikora 2013a; Sikora 2013b; Sikora 2013c; Sikora 2014.

131 Some ideas on these notions were provided in the work of Miśkiewicz 1969. See also Gardeła 2016 where the processes of constructing chamber graves are explored in detail.

132 On early medieval deviant burials in Poland, see, for example, Gardeła 2011; Gardeła 2012; Gardeła 2015; Gardeła / Duma 2013; Gardeła / Kajkowski 2013; Gardeła 2017.

5.2 Preparing the body for burial

There is not much we can infer from archaeological evidence found in early medieval Poland (nor from the available textual sources) regarding the ways in which the Slavs prepared the bodies of their dead for burial. However, some hints can potentially be gathered from ethnographic accounts (dating from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries), which mention that in the case of inhumation burials, the initial preparations of the body for burial involved its washing.[133] This practice was not only triggered by hygienic concerns but seems to have had some symbolic overtones, as implied by the frequently mentioned act of pouring the dirty water outside the house after the body had been washed.[134] We may assume that because the water was in direct contact with the dead, people feared that keeping it in the house (or pouring it there) might encourage the dead to return to the world of the living. Therefore, disposing of it outside the threshold[135] (which may be understood as a border between the 'inside' and 'outside' worlds – *orbis interior* and *orbis exterior*) in a symbolic and practical way separated the dead from the living. However, there are also accounts mentioning that water that had been used to wash the dead could be endowed with apotropaic qualities.[136]

According to some ethnographic sources, the people responsible for washing the deceased would sometimes talk to them in kind words during the process.[137] It was believed that this would make the body and its limbs 'softer' and easier to prepare for burial. In addition to washing the body, it is possible that the preparation of the cadaver also involved combing and arranging the hair as well as dressing the body in special clothes perhaps made specifically for the burial. Various toilet implements (e.g. bone and antler combs) are often discussed in this light, for example with regard to mortuary practices in early medieval England,[138] but in the case of the archaeological materials from Poland, such items were rarely placed in graves (or at least, as organic materials, they do not survive in the archaeological record). Some graves discovered in Pomerania contain needles and other implements for textile production[139] – we do not know for certain, however, if these were employed in preparing clothes for the dead or whether they signaled other meanings. I will return to these problems further below.

133 See, for example, Lach 2000, pp. 90–91; Nienałtowski 2007; on the role of water in various mortuary practices, see also Janowski / Kurasiński 2008, p. 71.
134 Bylina 1992, p. 12.
135 On the meaning of thresholds, especially in Viking Age Scandinavia but also elsewhere, see the recent work of Eriksen 2015.
136 Bazińska 1967, p. 152.
137 Lach 2000, pp. 90–91.
138 Williams 2003.
139 Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1982, p. 115.

5.3 Transporting the body

Extant textual sources concerning early medieval Poland lack information about the procedures of transporting the bodies to the place of burial. However, based on comparative evidence and much later ethnographic materials, we may suppose that the process of moving the body from the house (or some other place where it had been kept before the burial) could have involved a special funerary procession. Whether the bodies were carried on wooden biers, in coffins, or transported on various types of vehicles or vessels (carts, wagons, sledges or even dug-out boats or ships) is difficult to determine, but as we shall see below, the available archaeological material may provide some hints.

Some inhumation graves discovered in the territory of Poland contain traces of wooden biers in the form of decayed wood lying beneath the skeletal remains. In 2013, I encountered traces of such remains during excavations directed by Dr Jerzy Sikora in an early medieval cemetery at Ostrowite. The presence of biers was clearly visible in the form of dark stains of varying length and width in the soil, but their rectangular shape clearly implied that the biers were made from wooden planks. At the head and foot-end of one grave, one could also see traces of transverse planks or logs, which probably enabled carrying the bier with the body to the cemetery and placing it within the grave-pit (Fig. 5). Traces of this kind are rarely observed (or recorded) in early medieval cemeteries in Poland,[140] but given the large number of graves without coffins or any other transportable 'containers' for the body, the practice of carrying the dead to the graveside on biers must have been rather frequent.

From the late tenth century onwards, inhumations in coffins begin to appear in Poland. This practice may result from the ongoing processes of Christianisation,[141] but the shift in religious beliefs may not be the only explanation for the use of coffins. First and foremost, coffins provide a means of concealing the body, and perhaps in some instances this was particularly desired due to the (visually unpleasant?) state of the corpse. However, coffin burials may also result from other circumstances, for example the necessity to transport the cadaver over a longer distance. It is possible to assume that the body was placed in a coffin after it had been washed and dressed and then carried or transported (on a wagon or sledge?) to the place of burial. What we do not know, however, is whether the coffins already had permanent lids while they were being carried to the cemetery, or whether their final sealing occurred at the graveside, thereby enabling the mourners to

140 Other examples are known from the early medieval cemetery at Poznań-Śródka and Pyzdry – see Pawlak 1995, p. 116 and Jagielska 2010, p. 133 for further details.

141 For a thorough discussion of changes in funerary practices and the influence Christianity had upon them, see the important work of Rębkowski 2007, pp. 89–161.

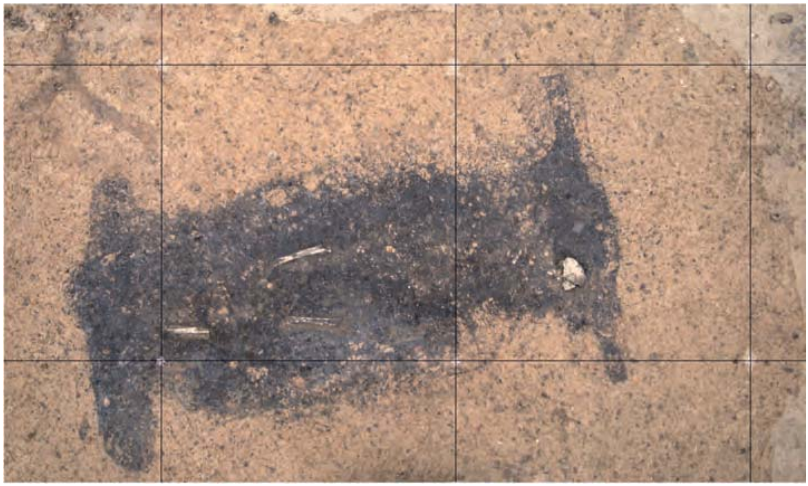

Fig. 5: One of the graves from Ostrowite with a clearly visible wooden construction, probably a bier, used to transport the deceased to the cemetery. Photo by Jerzy Sikora. Used by kind permission.

see the dead for the last time. An open coffin would also allow the participants of the funeral to deposit various objects inside it, thereby providing a chance for the display of wealth, prestige, status and other symbolic meanings.[142]

5.4 Burying the body

As we have seen in the sections above, archaeological excavations conducted in various early medieval cemeteries in Poland demonstrate that, depending on the region, there existed various ways of burying the dead in the period between the tenth and thirteenth centuries. This variety in dealing with the dead may have depended on local customs, availability of necessary resources (e.g. wood or stone), wealth of those responsible for the funeral and other factors. In this paper, it is of course impossible to present a detailed overview of all these variants, but some general observations can indeed be provided.

Most cemeteries comprise flat inhumation graves in which the cadavers were interred in pits without any additional wooden constructions. As mentioned above, at some of these sites, however, there is evidence of burying the dead on wooden biers (on which they might have actually been carried to the cemetery) or in wooden

142 On related issues of display and commemoration at the graveside, see especially the work of Williams 2006.

coffins occasionally adorned with nails or iron fittings. More recent studies have also revealed evidence for burying the dead in so-called chamber graves[143] – essentially large underground rooms or 'houses' for the dead, constructed from wooden planks or beams. The bodies placed within chamber graves could be laid directly on the ground (perhaps originally on biers) or in coffins. Chamber graves certainly represent some of the most complex and time consuming funerary structures in early medieval Poland. They were probably constructed for people of considerable standing and may have been a marker of their (or their mourners') wealth, status and perhaps religious beliefs. A very rare and interesting custom observable at some sites involved placing the dead on dug-out boats; such graves are known predominantly from the area of Pomerania,[144] with occasional examples in Silesia[145] and elsewhere.[146]

Not all early medieval graves in Poland contained grave goods (or at least we cannot determine this today due to poor preservation), but their different variants discussed above may have been furnished with objects ranging from everyday utensils, vessels (sometimes containing food and drink), textiles, jewellery and weapons – the possible meanings of these items will be discussed further below. In most instances, the dead were buried singly, but there are also examples of double[147] or even mass graves. Interestingly, some of the most lavishly equipped graves are those of children.[148] Fragmentary animal remains, probably representing food or amulets, are also occasionally found in graves, but whole animal carcasses are generally not buried with the dead in early medieval Poland. Their separate 'graves' (or deposits) are, however, found in some early medieval cemeteries, for example in Greater Poland.

We have now briefly discussed the internal forms of early medieval inhumation graves in Poland, but it is worth noting that their external structures also display some variability. Most graves appear to have been flat, but some of them were covered by low mounds. In certain areas, for example in Central Poland and Masovia, graves were additionally marked on the surface with stones, and in some instances the stones were aligned in geometrical patterns (usually rectangles).[149] In most instances, however, it is impossible to identify any clearly discernible external structures, but this may result not necessarily from their complete lack in the past but simply from later destruction and agriculture.

143 On chamber graves in early medieval Poland, see, for example, Chudziak 2001; Chudziak 2002; Chudziak 2003; Janowski 2011a; Janowski 2011b; Gardeła 2013; Janowski 2013; Ratajczyk 2013b; Buko (ed.) 2015; Janowski 2015; Błaszczyk / Stępniewska 2016; Gardeła 2016; Błaszczyk 2017.
144 Malinowska-Łazarczyk 1985, p. 86; Pawlak 2013, pp. 216–217.
145 Gardeła 2012, p. 33 with references.
146 Pawlak 2013; Gardeła 2014, pp. 35–36.
147 Gardeła / Kajkowski 2014.
148 See, for example, Miśkiewicz 1967, pp. 120–121; Gardeła / Duma 2013 with references.
149 Rauhut 1971.

5.5 Funerary festivities and the funeral feast

It is difficult to determine the character and emotional mood of Slavic funerary performances. We do not know if these were generally sad or merry events, and perhaps even making such dualistic distinctions is inappropriate, as funerals varied from place to place and depended on a broad range of factors. However, what we can infer from extant textual sources is that in some areas funerals may have involved a range of dramatic performances in which the mourners would resort to various theatrical techniques, some of which required wearing special masks. Among the Eastern Slavs, the preserved name for funerary festivities was *tryzna* (*tryzniščе* in Old Church Slavonic).[150]

The finds of pottery shards and loose animal bones in cemeteries, both in the grave fills and on the surface, could possibly suggest that various meals and drinks were consumed there, either during or after the funerary ceremonies. Such a special ritual feast was known among the Slavs as *strawa* (in today's Polish *stypa*). According to some scholars, during this feast the deceased person was symbolically fed by the mourners, and in this way he or she shared food with them.[151] Unfortunately, not much can be said about funeral feasts based on the available archaeological materials, but some recent finds have been interpreted as representing offerings of food for the deceased. For example, in his book Andrzej Buko discussed the discovery of a puzzling deposit found at the stronghold in Ryczyn in Lower Silesia[152] – a wooden structure in the shape of a boat which contained layers of animal bones (some of which lay in anatomic order), including those of a dog, horse, pig and birds. In Buko's view, this deposit could have represented burial gifts intended for the journey to the Otherworld.[153]

6 The meaning of grave goods

In the sections above, I have mentioned that on some occasions the dead buried in inhumation cemeteries in Poland were provisioned with different types of grave goods, such as jewellery, weapons, clay and wooden vessels (e.g. buckets), but also with various other tools and small utensils. The meanings of these grave goods are not easy to unravel today – they may have been priced personal possessions of the deceased or objects belonging to the mourners who placed them in the grave at the funeral with some special purpose in mind. It is clear, however, that the items buried with the dead did not only (or at all) manifest status, wealth or profession which

150 Bylina 1992, p. 9.
151 Bylina 1992, p. 10.
152 Buko 2011, pp. 407 ff.
153 Buko 2011, p. 408.

the deceased had in life, but they also served as powerful symbols and mnemonic devices.[154] Their presence in the graves may also potentially tell us something about the conception of the Otherworld(s) to which the dead were believed to depart, and perhaps also about the nature of the journey that led there. Although inhumation graves generally (yet with some exceptions) begin to appear in the area of Poland along with the official introduction of Christianity in the late tenth century, I would argue that the manner of treating the dead at that time still preserves very strong traces of older non-Christian customs and beliefs. It seems that in the period between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, the provision of grave goods represented a transitional phase and the blending of old pagan traditions with the new Christian ideologies. Below, we shall take a closer look at the different categories of objects placed in inhumation graves and attempt to unravel the meanings they may have held.

6.1 Jewellery and amulets

In funerary contexts in early medieval Poland, jewellery is found predominantly in the graves of women and children although it may occasionally be encountered in the graves of men (e.g. especially in the form of rings). Interestingly, it is often the case that the graves with the largest numbers of jewellery items are those of children, in particular young girls.

In life, jewellery could have played various roles – it may have represented wealth, status, religion but also group affiliation. Some very characteristic types of jewellery (such as Slavic head adornments in the form of so-called temple rings)[155] may have also been regarded as distinctive ethnic markers.

The provision of jewellery in graves may have had multiple meanings – some items could have served the role of adornments allowing to display the corpse to the mourners in a visually attractive way. Moreover, some items of jewellery could have been regarded as amulets protecting the dead on their way to the other side. It is very difficult to provide any general claims here, however, and we must remain open for various interpretational possibilities. It seems that the meanings with which jewellery was imbued in funerary contexts probably varied from one region to another and among different individuals.

It is worth noting that in addition to jewellery made of ferrous and non-ferrous metals (e.g. silver, gold or copper alloys), some graves also included objects that can be regarded as amulets. Among such amulets scholars often list animal teeth and claws, belemnites and organic amulet-pouches (so-called *kaptorgas*) suspended

154 On the mnemonic role of objects and aspects of remembrance and forgetting at early medieval funerals, see Williams 2006.

155 On the symbolic meanings of temple rings, see, for example, Hensel 1970; Posselt / Szczepanik 2017.

around the neck.[156] Amulets are generally regarded as protective objects against misfortune or danger. Perhaps placing them in graves protected the dead on their way to the Otherworld. Alternatively, it is possible that amulets in funerary contexts protected not the dead but the living.

6.2 Weapons

Various kinds of weapons are found in inhumation graves from the area of Poland which date between the tenth and thirteenth centuries. The most common weapon types deposited with the dead are axes and spears, but on occasion swords are also found.[157] In addition, some graves contain small projectiles such as arrowheads, and interestingly these are also encountered in graves of children.[158] In Polish archaeological publications, weapons are usually seen as indicators of a military status of the dead, and there is a dominant tendency to label weapon graves as those of 'warriors'. However, recent studies of the practice of weapon burial in Poland are beginning to nuance this anachronistic view and highlight the symbolic roles of military equipment.[159] The argument that weapons should not only be regarded as indicators of warriors is further substantiated by the fact that swords, spears or axes are relatively rarely encountered in early medieval cemeteries. Even the cemeteries located in close proximity to strongholds (thereby implying that they belonged to the stronghold's population and possibly its armed crew) often have only few weapon graves (if any at all). This fact raises obvious questions about what happened to the warriors who protected these places and where they were buried.

Based on these observations, it seems that among the Slavs who inhabited the area of Poland in the early Middle Ages, weapons were only deposited in graves in very exceptional circumstances and with special intentions in mind. Even if some individuals were actively involved in military activities during their lives, they may not have been buried with war gear. Unfortunately, we do not know for sure why on some occasions weapons were buried with the dead. Was it done to mark their special status? Or perhaps the act of placing weapons in graves manifested the wealth and prestige of those who orchestrated and attended the funeral? Were weapons necessary in the journey to the Otherworld? Or did they serve some special protective role,

156 For an overview of different types of amulets in early medieval Poland, see Jaguś 2003. For a more recent and critical discussion, see Gardeła 2014, pp. 125 ff.

157 Graves with different weapon types are particularly common in the area of Masovia and Podlachia. For a discussion on these finds, see Rauhut 1971. However, weapons in funerary contexts are also known from other parts of Poland including, among others, Silesia and Greater and Central Poland. They are also occasionally found in early medieval burials in Pomerania.

158 Kurasiński 2004.

159 See, for example, Sikora 2014; Gardeła 2018.

perhaps guarding the grave and its contents or enabling the dead to defend themselves against something or someone? The answers to these questions are indeed difficult to provide, and the meanings behind weapon burials probably varied among individuals and in different regions of Poland.

6.3 Vessels of wood and clay

Early medieval inhumation graves discovered in the area of Poland occasionally contain vessels made of clay or various organic materials. A number of graves have also been furnished with bronze bowls. In this section, we shall take a closer look at these finds and try to unravel their potential symbolic meanings.

Clay vessels from funerary contexts have different shapes and sizes (for example s-shaped, with a cylindrical neck or flask-shaped).[160] They are often discovered in graves furnished with military equipment, and most of such finds come from the area of Central Poland and southern Masovia.[161] Clay vessels were usually placed at the feet of the deceased, and it is rare to find more than one such vessel in a grave.[162] Although a number of scholars have suggested that some clay vessels were produced specifically for burial, this view is difficult to support, since there are no clear differences between clay vessels recovered from settlement sites and graves.[163] Specialist analyses of residues demonstrate that the vessels from burial contexts may have contained milk products, fish and meat, but it is difficult to determine if these represent some special funerary meals or food that the dead enjoyed the most during their lives.[164] The discoveries of loose pottery shards in graves (or in their fills) are sometimes interpreted as signals of rituals associated with the 'cult of the dead'[165] or as traces of the ritual breaking of pots at the graveside. As interesting as these interpretations are, it is also possible that they simply represent the remains of damaged and redeposited pots which got mixed up with the soil and were accidentally thrown in the grave-pit during its backfilling.

Another category of vessels discovered in early medieval Slavic graves includes buckets with iron rims and occasionally with bronze fittings. This group of finds has recently received increased scholarly attention in the work of Andrzej Janowski and Tomasz Kurasiński.[166] Current overviews of graves with buckets from the area of Poland have demonstrated that such vessels are usually buried at the feet of the

160 Janowski / Kurasiński 2008, p. 73.
161 See Rauhut 1971; Janowski / Kurasiński 2008, pp. 72–73.
162 Janowski / Kurasiński 2008, p. 75.
163 Janowski / Kurasiński 2008, p. 74.
164 Janowski / Kurasiński 2008, p. 76.
165 Janowski / Kurasiński 2008, p. 73.
166 Janowski / Kurasiński 2008.

deceased, with only a few instances of placing them elsewhere (for example near the head).[167] The purposes of buckets could have been manifold, and in past research it has been suggested that they may have been part of equestrian equipment and used in feeding horses. More recent studies, however, have rejected this interpretation and shown that the volume of the buckets is too small to effectively use them to feed animals. Moreover, it has been argued that since the vast majority of buckets are made of yew (which has toxic qualities and in some societies strong symbolic associations with notions of death),[168] it is more likely that they were special vessels perhaps exclusively intended for funerary purposes. In the opinion of Janowski and Kurasiński,[169] some buckets discovered in funerary contexts may have played a role in communal "feasting with the dead", and some could have contained food and drink which the deceased required for their journey to the Otherworld.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the discoveries of bronze bowls which sometimes accompany the dead buried in Polish lands. The bowls display some diversity, including decorated and undecorated examples,[170] but overall they are generally regarded as rather luxurious objects. Interpretations of bronze bowls vary, and scholars see them as hand-washing basins[171] or as objects associated with early Christians.

6.4 Tools and utensils

A range of graves from early medieval Poland contain different kinds of tools and small utensils. The most commonly found objects are iron knives, but among other items we may list, for example, combs, needles, strike-a-lights, whetstones, scissors, keys, sickles, fishing hooks and awls.[172] We do not know for certain what the role of these objects was and what exactly they symbolized in a funerary context. They may have been personal possessions of the deceased, but it is also possible that they belonged to the mourners and were placed in graves with some special purpose in mind. Some interesting interpretations of the meanings of small utensils discovered in early medieval graves in Poland have recently been provided by Tomasz Kurasiński,[173] Kamil Kajkowski and Paweł Szczepanik.[174] Kurasiński's analysis has focused only on utensils discovered in so-called 'warrior graves' (i.e. graves including weapons), and in his view the utensils from funerary contexts may have manifested the social position

167 Janowski / Kurasiński 2008, pp. 65–66; Kurasiński 2015; Kurasiński 2016.
168 Janowski / Kurasiński 2008, pp. 70–71; see also Kobielus 2006, pp. 44–45.
169 Janowski / Kurasiński 2008, p. 72.
170 Poklewski 1961.
171 Janowski / Kurasiński 2008, p. 79.
172 For a more thorough discussion, see Kurasiński 2008.
173 Kurasiński 2008.
174 Kajkowski / Szczepanik 2014.

of the dead and their profession.[175] He has argued that the (after)life in the Otherworld did not differ significantly from normal everyday existence and that the dead had the same needs as the living. Consequently, in Kurasiński's opinion, the utensils buried with the dead might have proved useful for them in the afterlife.[176]

Various interpretational problems arise when we try to interpret some of the most frequently found tools in early medieval graves in Poland, namely knives. Although some scholars have previously suggested that the presence of knives marks the graves of 'free' people,[177] this does not seem probable and can be challenged by the fact that there are graves with lavish furnishings which do not contain any knives at all. Quite naturally, it is difficult to see such graves as those of 'slaves'. Therefore, rather than seeing knives as markers of social status, we should try to consider their other meanings and applications. It is also worth highlighting that in contrast to other categories of utensils discovered in early medieval graves in Poland, knives appear in funerary contexts both singly and in larger numbers (graves with two or more knives are known from cemeteries at Ciepłe, Końskie, Młodzikowo, Sowinki and several other places).[178] What has often been overlooked in past scholarship is that some knives were discovered in sheaths, while others were buried without them. There may also have been cases of concealing such objects and wrapping them in textiles or placing them in organic pouches (this was observed in the case of knives from Łączyno Stare,[179] for example). Moreover, as Kurasiński[180] has observed, a significant number of knives found in funerary contexts were broken. While in some instances this may result from these objects' fragility or various post-depositional factors, it is difficult to explain why so many knives from funerary contexts bear signs of damage. Could it be that knives were broken at the graveside during funerary ceremonies? What would such acts mean? So far, this problem has not been debated very extensively,[181] although scholars have considered cases of placing knives in unusual locations within the grave – for example near the head or at the feet. Some knives also appear to have been stuck in the skeleton. Such instances are often seen as apotropaic measures intended to 'hold' the dead in their graves, but this is not always the only possible explanation. Perhaps some knives were placed in graves so that the dead could protect themselves on their way to the Otherworld, or with the intention to provide them with a multifunctional tool with various practical applications?

Another group of objects discovered in some early medieval graves in Poland includes iron strike-a-lights and flint stones. The discoveries of strike-a-lights in

175 Kurasiński 2008, p. 28.
176 Kurasiński 2008, p. 29.
177 See discussion in Kurasiński 2008, p. 31.
178 Kurasiński 2008, p. 30.
179 Kurasiński 2008, p. 33.
180 Kurasiński 2008, p. 34.
181 But see Kurasiński 2008, p. 34.

different relation to the body (e.g. by the belt, on the chest, at the head or foot-end of the grave) could imply various things but may also suggest how these items were carried in life. For example, some of them may have been suspended on a belt, while others could be hung around the neck. It has been argued that strike-a-lights, as objects used for starting fire, may have had a symbolic function and served as apotropaic items. It might perhaps be possible to perceive them as items which could provide the dead with some means to produce fire and warmth during their (cold?) journey to the Otherworld or in the course of their (after)life there. I find it less probable to regard them as signals of status or special role that the dead had played in life, as suggested for example by Moździoch, who argued that they may have been markers of people responsible for lighting the fire.[182]

Whetstones are another category of utensils discovered in early medieval graves in Poland. In life, such objects were used to sharpen other tools or weapons. We do not know anything about the possible symbolic meanings of whetstones among the Slavs, but objects of this kind were endowed with special qualities among the Anglo-Saxons and Viking Age Scandinavians.[183] Perhaps furnishing Slavic graves with whetstones gave the deceased an opportunity to sharpen their tools or weapons in the afterlife, or maybe the whetstones referred to other ideas?

Among other utensils found in funerary contexts are ringed-pins made of iron (although there is some evidence for decorating them with other non-ferrous metals).[184] The purpose and meaning of these objects has been debated for a long time and today scholars still remain unsure about their actual function. It has been suggested that ringed-pins from Polish lands may have served as implements for fastening clothes or as styluses for writing on wax tablets. Some scholars saw them as awls, as a form of cutlery or even as musical instruments. In Kurasiński's view, using ringed pins as dining tools (as 'proto-forks') appears to be most convincing. Given their many possible applications, the meaning of such items in graves remains unclear, but if they really were used as items needed while eating, then we might speculate that this is something that the dead may have required in the Otherworld.

A relatively rare category of utensils discovered in funerary contexts includes iron sickles, and only few objects of this type have been found in early medieval Polish graves so far.[185] Sickles are tools used for cutting grass or crops, but they also seem to have been endowed with a fairly broad range of symbolic meanings associated with death and passing.[186] For example, they could be used as apotropaic objects intended

182 Moździoch 2002, p. 149.
183 On the symbolic meanings of whetstones, see especially Mortimer / Pollington 2013 with references.
184 Kurasiński 2008, p. 38.
185 Kurasiński 2008, p. 40.
186 Kurasiński 2008, p. 41.

to drive away evil or in some instances to prevent the dead from rising from their graves – the latter interpretation is well supported by ethnographic evidence and is reflected in recent excavations at an early modern cemetery in Drawsko Pomorskie in Poland.[187]

In addition to the objects discussed above, early medieval graves from Poland also included other utensils, such as keys, scissors,[188] fishing hooks,[189] combs,[190] needles[191] and spindle whorls,[192] but these categories of objects are extremely rare in funerary materials. Some scholars, such as Helena Zoll-Adamikowa, regard these utensils as personal attributes and symbols of the profession of the deceased.[193] However, given the rarity of such items in graves and the assumed high frequency of professions with which they could be associated in living societies (e.g. textile workers, fishermen etc.), this interpretation does not find solid support. It is interesting to note, however, that in one instance from the cemetery at Grzebsk, scissors were discovered in rather puzzling relation to the skeletal remains – they were buried between the legs of a deceased man.[194] Could this mean that they were carried at the belt? Or perhaps they indicate something rather severe, for example actual or symbolic castration? Or maybe they substituted for a body part the man had lost?

With the exception of spindle whorls, all of the items discussed above were found in graves including military equipment. In his important article on the role of utensils in graves, upon which the present discussion heavily builds, Tomasz Kurasiński[195] has regarded them as personal equipment of warriors, which they may have used during their various activities. However, apart from assigning them strictly functional aspects, Kurasiński has also observed that they may have possessed a fairly broad range of symbolic meanings. Some items may have served as objects of protection either for the dead or against the dead. Others could have served as necessary utensils on the journey to the Otherworld (e.g. strike-a-lights enabling to light a fire and produce warmth) or in post-mortem existence (e.g. eating with the use of ringed-pins). The symbolic nature of objects deposited with the dead cannot be doubted, but given the diversity of funerary practices on both local and supra-local scale, it would be risky to think that each object from a particular category of finds meant the same thing everywhere in early medieval Poland. Their metaphorical qualities probably

187 Gregoricka / Betsinger / Scott / Polcyn 2014.
188 Kurasiński 2008, pp. 42–43.
189 Kurasiński 2008, p. 43.
190 Kurasiński 2008, p. 44.
191 Kurasiński 2008, p. 43.
192 Kajkowski / Szczepanik 2014, pp. 417 ff.
193 See discussion in Kurasiński 2008, p. 42.
194 Kurasiński 2008, p. 42.
195 Kurasiński 2008, p. 46.

varied from place to place and depended on the character of the item, its condition, context (e.g. placement in the grave) and various intentions of the mourners responsible for its deposition. In conclusion, it is fair to say that no single explanation will ever be able to embrace the complexities of past funerary behaviour. Kajkowski and Szczepanik[196] see the utensils from funerary contexts in similar way to Kurasiński – they argue that the presence of such objects in graves did not necessarily mark the professions of the dead and instead had a broad range of symbolic overtones referring, among other things, to supernatural beings and the competences of some of the Slavic gods.

7 Journey to the Otherworld… and back. Final conclusions

The previous sections of this article have focused on reconstructing Slavic beliefs regarding the Otherworld(s), based on often fragmentary evidence. It started with a review of scarce textual sources from the Middle Ages which imply that the Slavs believed in a tri-partite division of the cosmos, comprising the sky/heaven, earth and underworld. It has also been suggested that the otherworldly domains could have been governed by gods with opposing characteristics, who are known from written sources as Svantevit/Perun or Triglav/Weles. Further analyses of archaeological and iconographic materials have tried to show that some of these cosmological ideas may have been visually expressed in different types of objects such as the Zbrucz statue, the zoomorphic and anthropomorphic knife sheaths and copper alloy spurs. Later parts of the present paper have focused on a critical examination of the diverse forms of burials in early medieval Poland and their contexts. An overview of various funerary traditions in different regions of the country has shown that in the period between the tenth and thirteenth centuries there existed various ways of treating the dead. Although inhumation was a dominant practice, the deceased were interred in a plethora of ways – in earthen pits, in coffins, in chamber graves and even in dug-out boats. These different forms of burials and 'containers' for the body could potentially tell us something about the ways in which the *post mortem* existence was imagined. Perhaps burials in chamber graves were intended to create an otherworldly home for the dead directly in the cemetery, a home which could potentially be visited and in which the living members of the family could interact with the dead in different ways. The occasional burials in dug-out boats may potentially represent a belief that the deceased had to travel to the Otherworld via water. This corresponds well with folkloristic materials which imply that the Otherworld was conceptualised as an island.

196 Kajkowski / Szczepanik 2014, p. 412.

Based on studies of unusual funerary practices, also known as deviant burials, it may be inferred that some of the dead did not want to leave the world of the living. Because people feared their return as animated corpses, they tried to protect themselves by burying the troublesome dead in a prone position, placing large stones on their bodies or even piercing them with stakes. Further parts of the article have concentrated on discussing the possible symbolic meanings and applications of the different objects deposited with the dead. It has been shown that although it is very difficult to interpret what these items may have meant and what role they played in funerary contexts, one thing is clear: they were not merely markers of status or profession of the deceased and must have held a plethora of special meanings.

Studies on mortuary practices in early medieval Poland have gone a long way since the first decades of the twentieth century when the main focus was on collecting the available data. Today, after over one hundred years of research on early medieval cemeteries, we can move forward and beyond the empirical and descriptive tendencies characteristic of earlier studies. I hope that I have managed to demonstrate that although the early medieval Slavs from the area of Poland did not leave behind any vernacular texts regarding their pre-Christian beliefs, a critical and thorough assessment of archaeological materials could indeed shed some light on their complex and fascinating world views. The next research step should focus on synthesizing the old and new archaeological finds from different regions of Poland and comparing them with similar materials from other parts of the Slavic world. Employing such a broad analytical perspective could potentially lead to some groundbreaking results, but it will certainly require many years of intensified work.

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Secondary Literature

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Clive Tolley

"Hard it is to stir my tongue": Raiding the Otherworld for Poetic Inspiration

Abstract: Otherworlds have lured people since time immemorial. The topic of this paper is an important aspect of this fascination: the mythological or legendary presentation of an encounter with an Otherworld, in connection with the acquisition of the gift of poetry. The traditions selected for consideration, to varying depths, are Norse (Scandinavian), Finnish, Siberian, Greek, Celtic (both Irish/Scottish and Welsh) and Anglo-Saxon. The chronological span is fairly large, but is primarily pre-modern, with a couple of forays into more recent sources steeped in older tradition. I am concerned with traditions, which implies an acknowledgement that motifs and narratives are passed on, but space precludes any detailed investigation of their exact course of passage. My focus, rather, is upon what might be termed the 'semantics' of expression, to examine both similarities between and particularities in the use of motifs within the various traditions. By bringing a selection of Otherworld visits related to the acquisition of poetic skill together into a survey whose net is cast fairly wide I hope to further our understanding of the treatment of this theme and the specific forms of expression it adopts. A thread that links all the traditions under consideration is the forceful manipulation by poets of the motif of the Otherworld visit or raid to emphasise their own poetic skills.[1]

1. Introduction – 2. Scandinavia: Óðinn's booty, 2.1 Óðinn and the mead of poetry, 2.2 Óðinn on the tree, 2.3 Óðinn the wanderer, 2.4 Poetry from death: the personalisation of myth in Egill's *Sonatorrek*, 2.5 Hallbjǫrn the shepherd poet – 3. Finland-Karelia: the chest of words, 3.1 The singer's words, 3.2 The Sampo and the Otherworld of the North, 3.3 The forest and the hunt in Finnish tradition, 3.4 Shamanic aspects, 3.5 The creative knee, 3.6 The Sampo and Iðunn – 4. Siberia: shamanism – 5. Greece: the cattle raid – 6. Wales: the cauldron of poetry, 6.1 Poetic inspiration (awen) and the figure of Taliesin, 6.2 Giraldus Cambrensis, 6.3 The cauldron, 6.4 *Preideu Annwfyn*, 6.5 The female guardian of poetic inspiration, 6.6 The *Ystoria Taliesin*, 6.7 Henry Vaughan and the tradition of Welsh poetic inspiration – 7. Ireland: the spring of knowledge, 7.1 The fairy cup, 7.2 The spring of knowledge, 7.3 Sucking on the thumb, 7.4 Finnéces and the legend of Sigurðr, 7.5 Liminality – 8. Anglo-Saxon England: the poet Cædmon, 8.1 Bede's tale of Cædmon, 8.2 The context of the Cædmon tale, 8.3 Cædmon and the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*, 8.4 Cædmon and Germanic tradition, 8.5 Cædmon and *awen*, 8.6 Gaelic (Irish and Scottish) influences, 8.7 Cædmon and shamanism, 8.8 Conclusion – 9. Conclusion

1 The article presented here is a preliminary and reduced version of my monograph, *"Hard it is to Stir My Tongue". Raiding the Otherworld for the Elixir of Poetry* (Tolley 2019).

1 Introduction

"Hard it is to stir my tongue." These are the words of the Norse poet, Egill Skallagrímsson, expressing the difficulty in turning to verse at a time of deathly sorrow. Images of how the skill to compose poetry is gained almost always emphasise the hardship involved – hardship bound up with death, or some other sombre Otherworld. It is a world difficult of access that has to be raided, forced to give up its treasures. Egill's poem opens up onto a world of imagery that portrays the attaining of poetic skill, which is found in a plethora of forms not only in Norse myth, but also in other traditions. It is my aim here to present a selective survey across a range of contiguous cultures on the mythological notion of securing poetic inspiration from the Otherworld, looking first at Norse sources, then turning to the Norsemen's Finno-Ugric neighbours to the east, before returning to Indo-European traditions, looking briefly at Greek traditions before moving on to the Norsemen's Celtic neighbours (in whose lands, of course, they settled extensively), and concluding with a consideration of Bede's account of the Anglo-Saxon poet Cædmon. I hope to highlight some of the complexity of imagery found when poets talk of poetry, and show how it varies between traditions. First, however, some comment should be made on what is meant by the two terms, 'Otherworld' and 'poetic inspiration'.

The use of the collective term 'Otherworld' perhaps begs the question; as Sims-Williams (2011, pp. 53–54) rightly points out, terminology in early sources indicates various different otherworlds.[2] The modern concept of one 'Otherworld', distinct from the mundane world we normally live in, is likely to derive from Christian world views. Nonetheless, provided that the term is understood to refer to any world distinct from that of mundane existence, without suggesting an ontologically polarised duality of 'this world' and 'the other world', and without prejudice as to the extent of differences between such other worlds, then it seems reasonable to let the term stand. When it is important to highlight the multiplicity of otherworlds, appropriate distinctions will be drawn, but the main concern in this essay is to recognise and investigate the distinction between the world of the living human community and any Otherworld that is contrasted with it in particular cases as a source of poetic power.

Murray (2006) makes some useful comments on "poetic inspiration"; the focus is on ancient Greek poetic inspiration, but many of the points are relevant to other traditions. She emphasises that it is a misapprehension to view inspiration as identical with possession and to regard inspiration and craft, *tekhnē*, as incompatible. The notion of the inspired poet as knowing nothing of what he is saying and being unable to explain whence his poetry springs is not primitive (in the case of Greece, it

2 He writes in reference to Irish tradition, but in terms that are equally applicable to other traditions. He notes (Sims-Williams 2011, p. 63), for example, that Welsh tradition appeared to envisage one Otherworld, Annwfyn, whereas in Ireland there was a multiplicity of Otherworlds, each within its own mound scattered across the landscape.

developed only in the fifth century BC, after the time of many extant earlier poets). Rather, "Although the initial inspiration appears to come to the poet as if from some source other than himself, the subsequent composition of the poem depends on conscious effort and hard work" (Murray 2006, pp. 39–40). The Muses were symbols of a poet's feeling of dependence on the external, the personification of his inspiration. They afforded permanent poetic ability (poetic genius) and provided temporary aid in composition (poetic inspiration). The distinction between these is important to bear in mind, but in practice the traditions about poetic inspiration often do not allow us to separate them: an initial aid in composition often appears to act as a proof of subsequent poetic ability, and we do not hear so much, within the mythological traditions considered in the present article, of the subsequent occasions when the master poet calls on his Muses, or the equivalent, to help with particular compositions. Hence I tend to use the term 'poetic inspiration' to include also 'poetic genius', without entering into the fruitless task of sorting out how far our inadequate sources mean the one rather than the other in any particular instance.

It is, nonetheless, striking that what poets wanted from the Muses was often information. As Chadwick (1942, p. 41) notes, "The association of inspiration and knowledge of whatever kind acquired by supernatural means is ancient and widespread. Inspiration, in fact, relates to revealed knowledge." This was reflected in Hesiod's making the Muses the daughters of Mnemosyne, 'Memory', which of course conserves information. Murray concludes (2006, p. 61) that "the idea of poetic inspiration in early Greece [...] was particularly associated with knowledge, with memory and with performance; it did not involve ecstasy or possession, and it was balanced by a belief in the importance of craft". These points are worth bearing in mind when dealing with Norse, Celtic and Finnish traditions too.

What actually constitutes poetry or 'the poetic' is, of course, a huge topic. Some useful observations are made with reference to certain old Welsh and Anglo-Saxon poems by Higley (1993). The medieval notion differed from the general modern one, and it also differed between cultures, with the Welsh (in Higley's opinion) being particularly apt to avoid the merely explicatory and to engage in juxtapositions of statements with no apparent link between them. Higley (1993, p. 100) notes the ubiquitous medieval and Renaissance emphasis on *tekhnē*, skill, and on the poet as an artificer, a craftsman whose tools are words. Poetry tends to be defined according to its rhetoric and figures (metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy and so forth). In line with the points made by Murray and Chadwick, demonstration of knowledge, of the world, of history, of whatever constitutes tradition, is crucial to the poet, and hence the cataloguing principle, which seems tedious to modern readers. Knowledge is conceived primarily as 'what I have seen', so that a declaration that 'I have seen' something lends authority to the speaker as someone wise. The implication of 'I have seen' is, of course, 'I can describe': Higley (1993, p. 123) notes Alcuin's presentation of the powers of the *mens* in his *De ratione animae*, that is "of such mobility that it does not become inactive even when it is asleep, of such speed that at one moment of time it surveys the sky

and, if it wishes, flies across the seas, traverses lands and cities, in short, by thinking, it, of itself, sets before its view all things it chooses, however far and wide they may be removed". This is 'imagination', in the sense of being able to assimilate information and form an image of something, rather than poetry (a distinction not sufficiently drawn by Higley). Yet it is the stuff of poetry, which presumably comes into existence when *tekhnē* is applied. This is perhaps seen in another observation of Higley's (1993, p. 121) on some of the Old English gnomic verse (maxims): while these may consist of lists of mundane observations with often little apparent semantic or experiential connection, it is typical to begin each new maxim on the b verse, so that it is linked with the preceding example through alliteration: the poet thus shows his knowledge of how the world is in its multifarious and ostensibly unconnected ways and expresses the underlying order by applying *tekhnē* – making poetry out of this knowledge (here, alliteration). While it seems relevant to have outlined some aspects of what may have been meant by 'poetry' and 'poetic inspiration' in the medieval and folk traditions under consideration, to go further into these topics would divert attention from the main point of the current investigation, the otherworldly nature of this inspiration.

2 Scandinavia: Óðinn's booty

The hardship of securing the gift of poetry is explicit in the primary myth about poetic skill in Norse, Óðinn's raid of the fastness of the giant Suttungr. I shall begin by looking at this myth and then consider two others featuring Óðinn which might loosely be characterised as 'raids on the Otherworld to secure poetic skill'. I then look at a humanisation of some of these mythic motifs in Egill Skallagrímsson's *Sonatorrek*, from which the opening citation is taken. Many of the points considered bear comparison with materials from other traditions, presented later in the article; such comparison is directed towards illustrating the varying manipulations of traditions in the hands of poets.

2.1 Óðinn and the mead of poetry

Poetic inspiration from the Otherworld is the core theme of the most significant of Óðinn's adventures, when he set out to retrieve the mead of poetry/wisdom. An allusive outline of the myth is given in *Hávamál*, st. 104–111; the fullest, and somewhat different, form of the myth is recounted by Snorri Sturluson (*Skáldskaparmál*, ch. G57–58) and may be summarised thus:

The two classes of gods, Æsir and Vanir, cement a peace treaty by spitting into a vessel and they make the agreement permanent by forming a man, Kvasir, out of the spittle. Kvasir is immensely wise, and he goes wandering the world. He is slain by

some dwarfs, who brew mead out of his blood, which embodies Kvasir's wisdom. The dwarfs are forced to ransom their lives when threatened by a giant by offering him the mead, and so the liquor ends up in the fastness of Suttungr's mountain, kept in three vats, named Són ('Life-blood'), Óðrerir ('Stirrer of the spirit [of poetry]') and Boðn ('Bushel'). Óðinn, by various subterfuges, gains access to the mead through great difficulties and manages to consume it, sweet-talking its guardian, Suttungr's daughter Gunnlǫð. He flies back to the fortress of the gods in the form of an eagle, pursued by Suttungr, and regurgitates the mead into vessels laid out by the gods. Anyone who drinks the mead becomes a poet or scholar.

Broadly speaking, the myth relates a dual-aspect assault on the giants in the person of Suttungr: Suttungr loses both his wealth, metonymised as the mead of poetry, and his ability to negotiate kin relations, metonymised in his daughter, the sexual exploitation of whom by the hostile Óðinn must have annihilated any such role she might have gone on to play. Óðinn, of course, in both cases activates the potential of what the giant holds but does not put to use.

Óðrerir is formed from *óðr*, which is also the basis of Óðinn's name.[3] The word has various connotations, including primarily 'frenzy', but some sense of 'poetic inspiration' is apparent in it. Óðinn is the 'wild', furious god, but also god of poetry; he is comparable with the Irish Suibne *geilt*, the wild hero poet, who lives in the wilderness without ever being able to overcome his limitations (see p. 510). As Nagy (1996, pp. 29–30) points out, *geiltacht* – a subversion of societal norms – can only ultimately be expressed in poetry, a sort of subversion of rational expression. Just as Suibne is unable to survive in the world, yet achieves a sort of immortality through the preservation of his verse, so Óðinn, forever intent on forestalling, unsuccessfully, the destruction of *ragnarǫk*, secures the booty of verse – with which indeed his name appears to identify him – which is implicitly a form of immortality.

Indeed, as Doht (1974) demonstrates, the Germanic myth of the mead of poetry shows a particularisation of the motif of the salvation of the elixir of immortality from the Otherworld, as is found for example in the Indian myths of the *soma*.[4] It was perhaps a Germanic characteristic from early on to equate immortality with poetic memorialisation, as Tacitus hints in *Germania*, ch. 2:

> Celebrant carminibus antiquis, quod unum apud illos memoriae et annalium genus est, Tuistonem deum terra editum. Ei filium Mannum, originem gentis conditoremque, Manno tris filios adsignant.

3 I discuss *óðr* in Tolley 2009, I, pp. 101, 141, 180, 183, 353, 437 ff., 444–445, 450–455, 583.

4 Many discussions of this myth have been written, but Doht's study is, in the present context, the most worthy of mention. It builds on the work of Dumézil (1924), and, over-Dumézilian as it may in some respects be, it offers perhaps the most extensive comparative analysis of the motifs of the myth alongside similar myths from other traditions.

(They celebrate in ancient songs, which is the only form of commemoration and history among them, Tuisto the god, born of the earth; to him they assign a son, Man, the origin and founder of their race, and to Man three sons.)

The same is implied in Old English, for example by the last word of *Beowulf*, *lofgeornost* ('most desirous of praise') – the hero strove to live well to secure praise, and memorialisation, in verse. It was in this way that the elixir in all likelihood came to be identified as a poetically inspiring drink. The particularisation must surely also reflect the fact that the myths were told by poets, who were praising their divine patron for securing them their gift from the Otherworld. The Germanic poet thus appears to have made the hero-god in his own image as a poet seer.

The mead of poetry was kept in three vats. There is thus a symbolic link between the mead of poetry, a particularisation of the elixir of immortality, with the vessel or cauldron. Indeed, the name of one of the vessels in Snorri's account, Óðrerir, appears to mean 'Stirrer of the spirit', which is more apt as a name for the beverage than for its container. The cauldron appears in Norse also in a focal role in the myth recounted in *Hymiskviða* and *Lokasenna* of how the gods acquired a giant brewing vessel from the giants, in which the demigod of the sea, Ægir, brewed a beverage for a divine feast. Ægir's name is built upon a root that is cognate with the first element of the Indo-Iranian god's name Apām Napāt (discussed below); moreover, the feast he provides is said to be lit by *lýsigull* ('light gold'), just as Apām Napāt (and arguably his Irish counterpart Nechtan, if we infer the bursting of onlookers' eyes as resulting from a blinding light) is surrounded by what Dumézil termed "la gloire lumineuse". This sheen comes to be associated with otherworldly wisdom in Irish, as seen below, and hence by implication with poetic inspiration, but there is no explicit connection with poetry in the Ægir myth: Ægir's beverage is arguably more of a guarantor of continuing life,[5] a motif of widespread occurrence, as exemplified by the classical Greek *nektar* or the Indian *soma* (cf. Dumézil 1924, p. 8, who compares the Indian *soma* and Norse Ægir myths).

An earlier Germanic example of a cauldron, from a time when paganism was still at its height, is that used, according to Strabo, by the priestesses of the Cimbri to collect the blood of sacrificial human victims: the purpose was for the priestesses to make prophecies (*Geography* VII.ii.3). Thus, what survived only as a myth into medieval Scandinavia – the pouring of human *són*, in the sense of sacrificial life-blood, into a mighty vessel to achieve a state of mantic wisdom – was earlier realised as an actual cult event among the Cimbri. The vessel in which Kvasir's blood is brewed and the mantic cauldron of the Cimbri correspond to a degree both to the *peir dadeni* of the Welsh tale

5 The interpretation is not explicit in the sources, but I would read the provision of the beverage in a special Otherworld cauldron acquired from the giants as the *sine qua non* of the continuing feasting, and hence life, of the gods, with which we might compare their reliance on another food source, the apples of Iðunn, where their demise should they be deprived of this nourishment is made clear (the myth is told by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 2–4, based on Þjóðólfr's *Haustlǫng*).

of Branwen (with, in part, Irish origins), which ensured rebirth, and to the cauldron of Ceridwen, from which poetry is born (discussed below, pp. 496, 502). Ceridwen is pictured as a sort of witch, and the mantic priestesses of the Cimbri might similarly be characterised; the Norse vats of poetry are guarded by a female, Gunnlǫð, who is not so clearly witch-like, but the symbolic links, perhaps stronger than might be expected, in Norse tradition between the mead of poetry and the witch's potion (both, for example, characterised as made from body-parts and guarded by a female) are explored by Varley (2015). The points of comparison suggest an ancient shared tradition, perhaps an areal Continental Germanic-Celtic feature, that has undergone different developments in the subsequent traditions. In both Norse and Celtic records, the image of a cauldron endowed with supernatural powers has been used to emphasise particular aspects of its power in different contexts, ranging from rebirth to mantic and poetic skills.

It is possible, even if the image of the cauldron reflects a shared Celtic-Germanic tradition, that the imagery was reinforced by later contact, most obviously in Gaelic-speaking areas. The three-fold division of the cauldron which occurs in Norse is parallel to the three cauldrons of wisdom and inspiration in the eighth-century Irish *Cauldron of Poesy*, though the Irish text uses a complex set of metaphors to communicate a philosophical point about the gaining of wisdom (Breatnach [ed.] 1981), whereas the Norse narrative exists only in mythic form.

As the myth of the mead of poetry exists *in extenso* only in prose, with a scattering of allusions to it in extant poetry, it is difficult to apprehend how poets manipulated the myth, in the way we can approach the Welsh *Preideu Annwfyn*, for example (see discussion below, pp. 504 ff.). Yet a few inferences may be drawn. There are hints in the myth that Óðinn passed through death: the mountain where the mead is kept is Hnitbjǫrg, the clashing rocks: this is reminiscent of the rocks that clash together upon the ill-fated King Sveigðir in Þjóðólfr of Hvinir's *Ynglingatal*, st. 2, and of *Hávamál*, st. 106, which relates that Óðinn escaped through the hole drilled by the auger Rati and *yfir ok undir stóðumk jǫtna vegir* ('over and under me stood the giants' paths [= rocks]'; Snorri's version differs, in that Óðinn has to drill a hole into Suttungr's mountain and slither in as a snake, pursued by Suttungr's brother). Óðinn is also 'fettered' in the wings of the *óminnis hegri*, the 'heron of forgetfulness' (something comparable to the Greek Lethe, perhaps), as he acquires the mead (*Hávamál*, st. 13). These images emphasise the difficulty of ingress, and egress is always emphasised. The fettering in a confined, death-like space is reminiscent of the initiatory experience in the Gaelic bardic schools (see below, p. 509), which may also be reflected in Welsh traditions of Aneirin. Ford (1987, pp. 49–50) argues that Aneirin's declaration that 'I, not I, Aneirin' proclaimed poetry after this initiatory experience intimates an understanding that while the poet uttered the words, his inspiration, *awen*, was their source,[6] just as Óðinn bore the poetic mead

6 Ford relies on the tale of Gwion Bach in the *Ystoria Taliesin* as presenting an understanding and imagery of *awen* relevant to this much earlier text; while Aneirin's declaration may, in general terms,

inside him to the world of the gods. In Welsh, the Otherworld Annwfyn is 'very deep', or the 'not world'. Again, this links with the Norse tale: Óðinn is said by Eyvindr Finnsson (who uses a tradition varying slightly from Snorri's) in *Háleygjatal*, st. 2, to have taken the mead of poetry *Surts ór søkkdǫlum* ('from Surtr's sunken dales'). Surtr ('Black') is the fire giant who annihilates the world at the end of time, and his sunken dales are certainly a world of death; yet *søkk* also means 'treasure': his dales are the keepers of treasure, here poetic mead, just as Ægir lights his ocean realm with *lýsigull* ('shining gold'). The term moreover relates to mead, for *søkkvabekkr* ('sunken/treasure benches') was where Óðinn quaffed drink from golden chalices (*Grímnismál*, st. 7). Such complex imagery involves a play upon words which in itself constitutes the craft of poetry: and hence the deathly Otherworld is illumined with the treasure that symbolises what the poet ventures thither to find, and the journey, existing as a foray on the noetic plane of poetry, is its own fulfilment. We shall encounter similar notions elsewhere.

2.2 Óðinn on the tree

The passage into death is clearer – though still not explicitly stated – in the other great myth of Óðinn's acquisition of knowledge from the Otherworld, his hanging upon the tree in *Hávamál*, st. 138–141.

Veit ek, at ek hekk	I know that I hung
vindga meiði á	on the windy tree
nætr allar níu,	all of nine nights,
geiri undaðr	wounded with a spear
ok gefinn Óðni,	and dedicated to Óðinn,
sjálfr sjálfum mér,	myself to myself,
á þeim meiði	on that tree
er manngi veit,	that no one knows
hvers hann af rótum renn.	from what sort of roots it rises.[7]
Við hleifi mik sældu	With bread they did not bless me,
né við hornigi;	nor with the horn;
nýsta ek niðr,	I peered down,
nam ek upp rúnar,	I took up runes/secrets,
oepandi nam,	screaming I took them,
fell ek aptr þaðan.	I fell back from there.

be said to relate to *awen*, or poetic inspiration, it is also possible to read the declaration more straightforwardly, as a call for a sort of 'suspension of disbelief': to say 'I was there' is to declare 'I can tell you what it was like there'. In other words the poet, whatever his physical whereabouts, may, through *awen*, evoke reality. This, I think, is implicit too for example in the perceptions of the world from within the cell of the poet in *Etmic Dinbych*, discussed below, pp. 509–510.

7 The translation reflects the sense of *hvers* as 'what sort ot' argued by Quinn 2010, p. 210.

Fimbulljóð níu	Nine mighty charms
nam ek af inum frægja syni	I learnt from the famous son
Bǫlþórs, Bestlu fǫður,	of Bǫlþórr, father of Bestla,
ok ek drykk of gat	and I got a drink
ins dýra mjaðar,	of the dear mead,
ausinn Óðreri.	was laved with Óðrœrir.
Þá nam ek frævask	Then I began/learnt to flourish
ok fróðr vera	and be wise/virile
ok vaxa ok vel hafask;	and grow and prosper,
orð mér af orði	word sought out
orðs leitaði,	word for me,
verk mér af verki	deed sought out
verks leitaði.	deed for me.

Snorri does not relate this myth – he may have felt it encroached too far onto the central motif of Christian belief – so we are left with but this scant and ambiguous record of it. The myth involves a metaphorical journey to the Otherworld, in that Óðinn peers down and retrieves runes from below him. After acquiring the knowledge, Óðinn says *fell ek aptr þaðan* ('I fell back from there'), which similarly implies movement, if not a full journey. Yet there must have been a longer physical journey to the tree on which the god hung, though we are told nothing of this – it surely took place on one of Óðinn's wandering trips. The 'windy' (or possibly 'hanging') tree marks it out as being like a gallows, situated on the edge of inhabited areas: the acquisition of the runes is a result of liminal activity, and the tree is surely similarly placed in a liminal position on the edge of the world in this scenario. We might compare the securing of the Sampo from the out-of-the-way Northland in Finnish tradition. *Hávamál* makes clear that the acquisition of runes was the primary outcome of the exploit; runes are secrets or symbols of secrets, and although the word as recorded scarcely signifies 'poem' as such in Old Norse, when borrowed into Finnish in primitive Norse times as *runo* it bore a meaning of 'knowledge contained in verse'. Óðinn's exploits, gaining something which encapsulates the supernatural power of poetry from a peripherally situated and deathly Otherworld, parallels Väinämöinen's abduction of the Sampo in outline, though the element of sacrifice is prominent in the Norse myth but apparently absent in the Finnish, which should prompt a consideration of the relative position of sacrifice in the different traditions.

The connection with poetry is stronger than the mere semantic connotation of runes, however. There is surely little doubt that Óðinn's gaining of the 'dear mead' from the giant, who was his mother Bestla's brother, is a variant version of his acquisition of the mead of poetry – Óðrœrir – from the giant Suttungr. The myth is aligned here with the acquisition of runes: it would appear that nine nights on the tree, a deathly confinement as in Suttungr's mountain, resulted in knowledge of runes, alternatively realised as the nine charms/poems (*ljóð*) from the giants.

Both the myth of the mead of poetry and that of Óðinn on the tree have strong overtones of rebirth. His escape route through the narrow passage from the giant's mountain (in *Hávamál*) may recall the grave, as noted above, but it more strongly suggests the birth canal. Óðinn woos Gunnlǫð, then is fettered with forgetfulness, then escapes through the narrow passage (with the mead): it would appear that he in fact engenders himself in an act of pseudo-procreation and attains the new life of the spirit, symbolised by the mead. Clunies-Ross (1991, p. 42) outlines the basis of this concept: "pseudo-procreation allows men to rise above the death-producing realm of natural procreation and, by symbolically appropriating women's creative power, produce that which conquers death, the life of the spirit and the mind, social organisation and culture". The same process is evident in the hanging on the tree. Clunies-Ross (1991, p. 43) notes: "This act, the sacrificer's own death, represents the logical limit of the sacrificial system; it is this that the sacrifice aims to avoid by representing it. So, in Odin's case, his 'true' death is avoided by symbolically offering the death of the body in exchange for an intellectual rebirth." She goes on to suggest that being spattered with Óðrœrir is to be interpreted as a (pagan) baptism: "Odin the victim has been reborn as a spiritual 'child', admitted to the society of the truly living by his spiritual guardian, and soon initiated into full adult status and power." Yet the nine nights on the tree might also be seen (though Clunies-Ross does not do so in this context) as a symbolic gestation: if so, then Óðinn is again engendering himself, passing through death on the way (hanging on the gallows, just as he was fettered with oblivion under the mountain), before being born as a youth who grows and thrives with the new powers he has obtained. Comparisons might well be made both with the baby Hermes (p. 493) and the reborn Taliesin (pp. 498, 513 ff.) – though the Norse myths do not adhere in every respect to these parallels.

2.3 Óðinn the wanderer

Óðinn is the wanderer god *par excellence*. To wander is to encounter other worlds, distinct from one's own, and physical wandering acts as a metaphor for spiritual wandering or seeking. Many of his wanderings concern wisdom, and the contest for it, as when he encounters the giant Vafþrúðnir, or the cruel king Grímnir. He undergoes an extensive journey to retrieve the mead of poetry, and one is implied for his hanging on the tree. Seeking after wisdom in *Vǫluspá* and *Baldrs draumar*, he encounters seeresses, *vǫlur*, who themselves were usually characterised as wanderers, visiting various farms to tell fortunes:[8] here, the roles appear reversed, since the scenario, fairly clear in *Baldrs draumar* and implicit in *Vǫluspá*, is that Óðinn has himself wandered into remote regions and called up these unwontedly stationary seeresses from the grave

8 I discuss *vǫlur* more fully in Tolley 2009, *passim*.

(as Väinämöinen invokes Vipunen in Finnish folk tradition: see pp. 547–548). Óðinn similarly inverts the norms by practising the *vǫlur*'s special magic, *seiðr*, and arrogating to himself the effeminacy that accompanied it (Snorri: *Ynglinga saga*, ch. 7).

In the case of a woman, wandering is more strikingly a transgression into other worlds than for men: most women made one important journey, from girl to wife, which would involve a physical passage from one home to another (and hence a move to an Otherworld, of sorts). The *vǫlur* so to speak perpetuated the female rite of passage between worlds into a recursive visitation of the Otherworld, symbolised in their perambulatory lifestyle. Clearly, a woman's passage from girlhood to matrimony was also a sexual one, and to become a perpetual wanderer for a woman implied transgressing sexual boundaries on a recursive basis too; Heizmann (2002, pp. 205–210) has shown that in Norse tradition a woman who wandered was invariably seen as a whore. Sexual transgression, a liminal crossing of boundaries, brought power; and Óðinn, through his wanderings, appears to have arrogated supplementary power to himself by his adopting female form, and thus the additional transgressive potency of female wandering (if we take Loki's comments in *Lokasenna*, st. 24, to signify that he wandered over the earth in the form of a witch – *vitku líki*[9] – as he practised *seiðr* magic).

We do not have any explicit connection with poetic inspiration in these magical practices, such as we do in the case of the visit undertaken by Óðinn's Finnish counterpart, Väinämöinen, to the departed seer, Vipunen. The fact that such a connection is unrecorded, however, may be a reflection of the attenuation of our sources on magic practices, since it is typical of magical practitioners elsewhere: for example, the Siberian shaman is the main preserver of the traditions of the spiritual world and describes his encounters with it in markedly poetic, mantic, terms. It is thus reasonable to expect something similar to have occurred in pagan Germanic tradition. Indeed, in a general sense, such is implied in Óðinn's mastery of both *seiðr* and poetry, even if the two are not explicitly linked; it is also, perhaps, implicit in *Vǫluspá*.

Vǫluspá is not typically viewed as relating a variant of the myth of the acquisition of poetic inspiration, but it may be read (among other things) in this light. Thus the *vǫlva*, a practitioner of *seiðr*, is endowed with *fræði* ('knowledge'); it is to be *fróðr* that Óðinn seeks, just as he managed to be *fróðr* after gaining the *rúnar* while hanging on the tree, and brought back *fræði* – according to Snorri – in the form of poetic mead from Suttungr's mountain. It would, then, be wrong to make any clear distinction between *fræði* ('knowledge') and the skill to compose poetry, particularly if we bear in mind that 'gaining inspiration' may well have equated in pre-Romantic understanding to something more akin to a fact-finding mission (see introduction). The opening of the poem is a matter of interest here: it appears to have been fairly standard practice for a poet to ask for *hljóð* ('a hearing') from the audience before performance,

9 This reading does rely on a minor textual emendation, however, of *vitka* to *vitku*; see Tolley 2009, I, p. 160.

but *Vǫluspá* is unusual (certainly among Eddic poems) in incorporating this explicit request into the poem itself. *Hljóð* is primarily 'a hearing', but it also means 'what is heard', which is to say the poem itself: the opening appears to declare that the topic under consideration is the poem (or poetry, 'hearing') itself. The opening phrase is deictic: *hljóðs bið ek* ('I ask for a hearing'). The 'I' is none other than the (undefined) poet, yet later this 'I' emerges as the dealer in Otherworld knowledge, the *vǫlva*. The *vǫlva* has this knowledge because 'I remember nine worlds' (*níu man ek heima*), and whether this is construed cosmographically or temporally, it means she was a seasoned Otherworld visitor. The arrogation of knowledge to the first-person poet recalls the aretalogies of the Welsh legendary poet, Taliesin (see pp. 497–498); and the taunt offered by the *vǫlva* as a poetic refrain to Óðinn – 'Do you know yet, and what?' (*Vituð ér enn, eða hvat?*) – is of the same agonistic and scornful ilk as Taliesin's ridiculing of his competitors in *Angar Kyfundawt*. *Vǫluspá* in some respects approaches the Taliesin poems also in its rhetorical style, with juxtapositions of events or observations with no explicit links being made, and in the word-plays involved; the apparent splitting of the *vǫlva* in two, an 'I' and a 'she', which has led to a good deal of discussion,[10] recalls the apparently deliberate obfuscation that some of the Taliesin poems engage in. Wisdom gained from the Otherworld and its denizens is not meant to be easy, either of access or of understanding.

Hence Óðinn's visit to the *vǫlva* of *Vǫluspá* (and *Baldrs draumar*) emerges as yet another instance of the god seeking 'poetic inspiration' (in the wide sense of *frœði*) from a journey in which he encounters Otherworld beings. That *frœði* is, of course, manifested in a way that is commensurate with the skill of the poem that presents its revelation, so again we have the sense that the poet is demonstrating the accomplishment of his quest in the finesse with which he presents it: and here, I would suggest that this is effected in structural terms by the adoption of the first-person narrative method, which – whatever other purposes it serves – identifies the *vǫlva*, the communicator of the *frœði*, with the narrating poet. This does turn the normal pattern, in which the poet identifies with the hero quester, on its head, as here it is the holder of the object of the quest that emerges as the directing first-person force. This I would take, however, to be a reflection of the deliberately subversive nature of the poem, which cannot be discussed here.[11] It would be facile to infer anything about the gender of the poet, but, more importantly, *Vǫluspá* can certainly be approached as adopting a world view that might be imagined as characteristic of women who had Otherworld encounters.

10 The most cogent arguments in defence of the authenticity of the dichotomy (as opposed to its being a result of oral or scribal corruption) are offered by Dronke (1997, pp. 27 ff.), who sees the 'I' as essentially a living *vǫlva* who communes with a spirit informant, 'she', something with analogues in shamanic traditions. Even if we accept the complexities of interpretation that this implies, we are still left with a deliberately bewildering interplay of worlds that the different characters speak for.

11 I discuss the subversiveness of magic in Norse more fully in Tolley 2015a.

2.4 Poetry from death: the personalisation of myth in Egill's *Sonatorrek*

Mjǫk erum tregt	Very hard it is for me
tungu at hrœra	to stir my tongue,
eðr loptvætt	to set aloft
ljóðpundara,	the steelyard of song:
era nú vænt	not to be expected now
um Viðurs þýfi	is Viðurr's thieving,
né hógdrœgt	nor is it easily drawn
ór hugar fylgsni.	from the mind's lair.

So the warrior-poet Egill Skallagrímsson began his lament, *Sonatorrek* ('Banishment of Grief for Sons'), after the loss of his own sons at some point in the late tenth century.[12] The poem deals with death and grief, yet the theme of poetic composition pervades the work. Egill indeed may be said to visit, personally, the Otherworld of death, whence poetry – the booty stolen in myth by Óðinn (Viðurr) – sprang. Death makes it difficult to draw this booty from the heart or mind (*hugr*), just as Óðinn was hard-pressed to bring it from the deathly mountain fastness of Suttungr. Egill goes on to say that although Óðinn has given him 'a skill lacking blemish' (*íþrótt* [...] *vammi firrða*, st. 24), which is to say poetic skill, he is no longer Óðinn's friend and will not worship him. This can be read as including the notion that he rejects Óðinn's gift of compositional skill. Through a verbal echo, he contrasts (st. 2) the difficulty of letting poetry flow from the fastness of his breast (*ór hyggju stað*) with the way poetry was once secured from the giant's home (*ór jǫtunheimum*). The next (corrupted) stanza appears to shift the imagery of the outpouring to one of blood flowing from mortal wounds: here the sea, the realm of Ægir, is expressed in the *kenning* of the '[blood from] the wounds of the giant's neck' (*jǫtuns háls undir*), which refers to the primordial act of creating the world from the blood of Ymir. The sea beats against the dwarfs' boat-house doors, i.e. against the rocks – the rocks of dwarfs hinting again at death (as in the clashing shut of the rocks as King Sveigðir walked through a dwarf's stone door in Þjóðólfr's *Ynglingatal*, st. 2). The sea is the cause of at least one of the sons' deaths ('the sea cut the bonds of my family' – *sleit marr bǫnd minnar ættar*, st. 7), yet the

12 The text is preserved, in an often corrupt form as a result of centuries of copying, only in seventeenth-century manuscripts of *Egils saga*. Debate rages over just how old the poem is (see, for example, Tulinius 2009, and references therein), but most favour an early date – allowing for the possibility of later revision in oral and written transmission. There is thus always doubt over just how close we may come to what Egill himself composed, but, even through the unavoidably speculative interpretations of the corrupt passages, the poem retains a distinctive voice, unlike almost anything else in Old Norse, which represents a negotiation of the poet with tradition to express something both deeply personal and meaningful in terms of the tradition such as it is preserved for us in other sources. It is this, rather than its precise date, that I am concerned with.

death of Ymir – carried out, again, by Óðinn and his brothers – was the fundamental act of creation on which all subsequent creativity depends. Egill admits that Óðinn has given him 'recompense for ills' (*bǫlva bœtr*, st. 23) in the form of poetic skill, but the poem ends (st. 25) on a gloomy note, with Egill seeing the goddess of death, Hel, awaiting him on a headland – which is not merely a note of resignation at his own approaching death, but a further rejection of Óðinn, for Hel took those who were not accepted into Óðinn's warrior abode of Valhǫll.

The imagery is profoundly morose throughout the poem, and Egill links Óðinn's turning against him and allowing the deaths of his sons to an inability to compose verse in his despair. Yet the deep irony is that it is precisely this gloom that enables Egill to exploit the deathly imagery associated in tradition with the world from which the poetic mead was secured, and behind that the primordial murder which created the world itself. Hard it may have been, but Egill succeeds in eliciting a moving poem 'from the mind's lair' (*ór hugar fylgsni*, st. 1), just as Óðinn secured the mead of poetry from Suttungr's gloomy abode.

Egill's juxtaposition of just a few ostensibly objective statements about elements of a couple of Norse myths – the difficult garnering of the mead of poetry from the giants and the slaying of Ymir at the world's foundation – forms a masterful and allusively succinct expression of something deeply personal. His breast, from which poetry does not want to come any longer, is equated with the barren world of the giants, from which poetry was secured with huge difficulty. The deathly sorrow he feels at his offspring's loss at sea is reflected in the allusion to the ocean, formed from the blood of the murdered Ymir, yet, just as the deathly realm of Suttungr proved creative, yielding the mead of poetry, so the death of Ymir was the wherewithal to create the world. And so too the realm of death in which Egill walked in his sorrow was the means for him to produce this poem, which, by asserting the impossibility of creativity existing, in fact proves its very existence.

The mythic journey to the Otherworld is here reified as the journey into inner despair, and sorrow is banished by doing the impossible: making nothingness yield up its treasures. The notion of inspiration coming from a world of death, of non-being, that is implicit in the imagery of the traditional myths is here brought to bear on a vitally charged and personal response to death in a way that only a skilled poet, imbued with a deep understanding of the imagery of traditional verse and myth, could manage.

2.5 Hallbjǫrn the shepherd poet

The notion of poetry stemming in some way from contact with an Otherworld of death may be manifested in a variety of ways. One instance, of a much lighter, almost comic, tone, is found in *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds*, ch. 8. The shepherd Hallbjǫrn is keen to compose verse, and regularly visits the burial mound of the renowned poet Þorleifr to

sleep on, as he tends his sheep. He is unable to compose more than an opening line of verse, until the dead Þorleifr, tiring of the constant attentions of the untalented shepherd, appears to him in his sleep and grants him the gift of poetic composition, as long as he can remember the verse when he awakes. He does remember and becomes a renowned poet himself.

This tale displays the commonplace motif of inspiration occurring in a dream – it resembles, for example, both Vaughan's story of the Welsh shepherd poet who receives his inspiration in sleep and the tale of the Old English poet Cædmon (discussed below). The main motif evident here is, as Buchholz pointed out (1971, p. 17), the practice of "sleeping on the mound", which was undertaken for the sake of gaining knowledge from the dead. Hence poetry is linked to the wider theme of magically acquired wisdom, a theme which tends in Norse texts to be elevated onto a mythological level.

3 Finland-Karelia: The chest of words

3.1 The singer's words

Let us take a glance at the Finnish-Karelian oral-poetic tradition by beginning with something that has no obvious link with my main theme, but which, as will become clear, in fact encapsulates some of the main aspects of the Otherworld journey and its connection with poetry. The renowned singer of the nineteenth-century Karelian village of Latvajärvi, Miihkali Perttunen, concluded one of his short traditional poems thus:[13]

Avasi šana[i]sen arkun,	He opened the chest of words,
virši-lippahan viritti,	tuned the case of verse,
poikki-puolim polvillaĥe.	right across his knees.
Tuošta šampo šanoa šoapi,	From there the Sampo gets words,
umpi-lampi ahvenia,	the closed pond perch,
meri pieniä kaloja.	the sea little fish.

This productive feat was the result of a contest between the culture-hero Väinämöinen and the dead seer Vipunen. Väinämöinen lacked some words to complete his boat – for he was on a journey – and could only attain them by cajoling the departed Vipunen to give them to him.

13 *SKVR* I_1 401, 51–54, Miihkali Perttunen, Latvajärvi, 1871.

The imagery used by Miihkali was earlier used by his father, Arhippa, from whom Lönnrot gathered some of the most significant poetic sources for the composition of the *Kalevala* in 1834:[14]

Aukoan sanasen arkun,	I will open the chest of words,
kirjo kannen kiimahutan	spread the speckled lid
poikki puolin polvilleni.	right across my knees.
Ei sampo sanoja puutu,	The Sampo does not lack words,
luettehia Lemminkäinen.	nor Lemminkäinen spells.

These passages are examples of the Singer's Words, used on formal occasions for introducing or concluding a performance of traditional verse. Most recorded epic verse lacks them, possibly because the recorders did not bother with them, but Arhippa's texts include several examples. In her study of the traditional Karelian song culture, Tarkka (2013, p. 129) points out that this stems from his status as a self-assured poet, convinced of his own poetic power, who emphasised the meaning and worth of his craft; his performative zest was boosted by the presence of an attentive and noteworthy collector (Elias Lönnrot). The personal element shaping traditional verse is to be found in other aspects too: Tarkka shows, for example, how the successful smith and farmer-fisher, Jeremie Malinen, boasted of always managing to get through life successfully; he sang the *Song of the Sampo* with the detail of how the smith Ilmarinen vaunted his skills at forging the sky: the smith who did this could manage anything, including forging a scythe to be sold at the local market. The singer thus used a mythic ideal to create a persona he identified with.

The Singer's Words are, almost by definition, a statement of poetic values, and the imagery used naturally reflects this. The chest of words and other images of containers for verse, such as store-houses, are commonplace in Finnish traditional poetry. Another such image is that of the skein of thread, which is unravelled, signifying the telling of the story, then wound up again and put in its cupboard. Such images can be found in many traditions, but may take on particular nuances in relating to the specifics of the cultures concerned. Germanic verse offers something of a contrast in terms of cultural connotations of the imagery here; we might mention the formulaic Old English phrase *wordhord onleac* ('he unlocked the word-hoard'), which similarly represents poetic speech as an opening of a store; yet here, the poet-speaker equates himself with a generous lord, whose role it was to unlock his hoard or store of treasures and distribute them to his loyal followers, just as the poet distributes his creative bounty to his listeners. Poetry in Norse myth was represented as mead, stored in three vats: again, a container whose contents would be distributed to a lord's followers at the hall feast.

14 *SKVR* I_3 1278, 19–23, Arhippa Perttunen, Latvajärvi, 1834.

3.2 The Sampo and the Otherworld of the North

The ostensible journey that Väinämöinen makes is a mundane boat trip, but this metamorphoses into an Otherworld journey in the form of a visit to the dead Vipunen (Tarkka 2013, pp. 183–184), into whose mouth he trips:[15]

Astu päivän helkytteli	He trod for a day clinking
miesten miekkojen teriä,	upon men's sword-blades
astu päivän, astu toisen	he trod a day, another
naisten neiklojen neniä,	upon women's needle-points
niin päivänä kolmantena	so on a third day
torkahti toinen jalkaah	one of his feet tripped
vaapahti vaasemutensa	his left slipped into the mouth
suuh Antervo Vipusen	of Antervo Vipunen
ku on viikon maassa maannut	who had lain ages in earth
kauan mannussa levännyt.	who had rested long in soil.

Here – in a way reminiscent of Óðinn's confinement in Suttungr's death-like mountain, or the Gaelic bard in his grave-like initiation hut – Väinämöinen finds himself in strict confinement, and has to get himself out with great difficulty. He forges an iron staff and thrusts it into Vipunen's mouth; Vipunen orders him out of his lungs and liver, to which Väinämöinen retorts:

Lähen konna kulkustasi	I, villain, will leave your throat
maan valio maksostasi	earth's elect, leave your liver
kun sanot sata sanoo	if you say a hundred words
tuhat virren tutkalmuo.	the tips of a thousand songs.

Like his Norse and Gaelic counterparts, Väinämöinen gets the words he is after, for Vipunen complies, and Väinämöinen is able to finish his boat.[16]

This visit thus results in a fruitful creativity which is then linked, by Arhippa's son Miihkali Perttunen, to the Sampo. The Sampo is a somewhat nebulously defined mill-like object; but while traditions of the Sampo have surely been influenced by folktales of money mills, its origins lie far back, as a realisation or metonym of the world-sustaining

15 *SKVR* I_1 399, 38–47, 71–74, Arhippa Perttunen, Latvajärvi, 1834. Text and translation cited from Kuusi / Bosley / Branch (eds./transl.) 1977, no. 28.

16 In Norse, the issuing of words in the Otherworld is emphasised in the *Hávamál* version of the myth of the mead of poetry, where, st. 104, Óðinn says that *fátt gat ek þegjandi þar* ('little did I get by keeping quiet there'), and instead spoke many words in Suttungr's halls. The narrative context presents this in part as a means of chatting up the giant's daughter, Gunnlǫð, who then gives him the mead, but this reflects a general theme in the poem of Óðinn's flippant success with girls, and arrogating to his own cunning what might more reasonably be viewed as achieved from without rather than from within. The motif here no doubt stems from a more basic understanding that the whole episode of securing the mead from the Otherworld was one that induced an outflow of words.

pillar that is found widely in Siberia (Tolley 2009, I, ch. 10). In recorded Finnish tradition, it was closely associated with the seasons, the songs of the Sampo being sung at sowing and harvest, and it functioned as a metaphor for the created world itself, and the bounty of land and sea. The greatest telling of the Sampo myth is that of Arhippa Perttunen (Latvajärvi, 1834 , *SKVR* I_1 54). It involved a mighty quest and voyage by Väinämöinen and his fellow heroes to secure it from enemy hands in the realm of the North; this, however, resulted in its being shattered – an outcome parallel to the shattering of the egg which formed the world in the creation myth, and which resulted in imperfect produce from the land for men. However, the Sampo's abduction from the deathly world of Pohjola (Northland) represented an act of securing at least some welfare from the earth out of the grasp of the forces of destruction. As with the journey to the Otherworld in general, the wealth of the Sampo came to represent, in the hands of poets, the productive creativity of the singers who told of it (Tarkka 2013, p. 161).

Pohjola may be conceptually distinct from Tuonela, the land of the dead, but Pohjola is almost invariably described using the imagery of the realm of the dead, as a land of deprivation and absence of all goodness.[17] Herein lies an important aspect of Finnish poetry: the imagery of one genre or poem-type may be seconded for use in a different type, and more generally one thing may be described metaphorically in terms of another, so that a wedding, for example, may be depicted as a funeral (the girl's joyful childhood now ends as she passes into a death-like exile). This is too complex a matter to enter into here, but the potential for genre shuffling to occur in Germanic traditions is something that might be worth further consideration than it has perhaps been afforded.

The concrete journey which Väinämöinen typically undertakes is, then, itself a metaphor for the visit to the Otherworld which follows on its heels (Tarkka 2013, p. 187). The words, which of course form themselves into a charm, an effective tool for the completion of his boat-building, are equated with the bounteous Sampo. The boat or sleigh journey, transmuting into a trip to the Otherworld of the dead or of the North, stands as a metaphor for the passage of poetry, which, through this imagery, is seen as somehow otherworldly. The thread of a poem is its *juoni* – but this word too has otherworldly connotations. It means, in concrete terms, the trail a hunter follows; hunting took people into the Otherworld of the forest. Tarkka notes additionally (2013, p. 159) that the poetic journey may be pictured as taking place along "Lapland's ski-tracks" – the qualities of a good singer were often associated with the Sámi, so a singer would be called, for example, "a child of the Lapps". The Lapps in traditional verse encapsulate the notion of "the other", and hence constitute an Otherworld: so poetry, pictured as venturing into, or derived from, the Otherworld, is associated with this (supposedly) tangible Otherworld that was at least vaguely familiar to people. Hunting remained a significant aspect of Finnish culture and indeed does so to this

17 On Pohjola generally, see Siikala 2002, ch. 7.

day, and much of the imagery used in poetry relates to the hunt. A whole world view, which is fairly consistent throughout circumpolar regions, related to the hunt and its setting, which emerges most patently in bear-hunting poems (see Pentikäinen 2007 and Edsman 1994 on bear rites). Although the topic is somewhat tangential to the main theme of the present study, I give a short presentation of the imagery of the hunt and bear rites in the next section.

3.3 The forest and the hunt in Finnish tradition

The forest in Finnish tradition was a sort of Otherworld and was described in these terms: thus the hunter returns "from the end of a thousand airs, across nine seas", "from out there, across the northern river, the deep of Manala" (Manala, indeed, being the world of the dead: Tarkka 2013, p. 339).

The hunt gives rise to a set of images, imbued with Otherworld notions, within poetic tradition. However, since the specific notion of deriving poetic inspiration from the forest Otherworld is not apparent, I consider this imagery here in a separate subsection rather than in the main argument.

The world of human activity was divided between the home (the domestic) and the outer world (the wider community and beyond), the domestic sphere being that of women and the non-domestic that of men. The hunting grounds of the forest clearly belonged in the latter category and were firmly in the hands of men: women had no part in the hunt itself. Yet the forest, the wild, contrasted along a different line with the human world in general. The forest was an Otherworld to humans, and conversely humans, from the forest's perspective, were denizens of an Otherworld. Thus the one world could be viewed as an inversion of the other: hence we find descriptions of the one in terms of the other, as when the huntsman's home is called "a room of pinewood, a lair of pine" (Tarkka 2013, p. 338). As an antithesis of the human world, the forest with its denizens was conceived in terms of what it was most remote from: the domestic. Hence it was viewed as the domestic sphere of the forest mistress, and the wild animals were her cattle. This was not merely a mirror image: it was also an inversion, in that rulership of the forest community lay in the hands of a woman, not a man. Men who visited the forest were outsiders to this realm: their position of mastery was inverted to subservience to the forest ruler, a mistress, and the outside world in which they belonged became a female domestic sphere where too they did not belong. The otherworldliness of the female mistress of the forest is reflected too in her constant epithet *tarkka* ('strict, precise'), more an attribute to be expected of male rulers, which hinted that if hunters failed to follow her hunting tabus exactly, they would be punished. Hence it was only through careful propitiation that the fundamentally transgressive act of raiding another's home and entering the female sphere could be tolerated. The hunt was not so much taking what men wanted as being granted prey by the mistress as an act of hospitality in her own

home. Hunting incantations usually addressed female tutelary spirits of the forest rather than for example the more remote male guardian of the wild, Tapio (Tarkka 2013, p. 342).

The hunting mentality was thus one of respect and reciprocity (propitiation being made for taking one of the denizens of the forest away), characterised by a rich and complex symbolism. The notion of reciprocity and intermingling of worlds reached its zenith in the bear-wake rites (*karhunpeijaiset*). These were found across much of the circumpolar region, including Finland and Lapland. Whilst the records from Finland, on the periphery of this region, are to a degree depleted in terms of preserving as full a symbolism as has been recorded among other peoples such as the Khanty, it is nonetheless clear that the bear was conceived to be a divine creature, lowered from heaven to earth, who spent a time here before being returned to heaven in the wake – which was imagined in terms of its opposite, as a wedding – as a consequence of being hunted (see Pentikäinen 2007, ch. 7; note how one of the earliest bear-wake poems is entitled *Kouvon päälliset*, 'The Forefather's Wedding'). As Tarkka points out (2013, pp. 347–348), we have two Otherworld visits here: by the bear, both in terms of its descent from heaven to earth and its transgression from the wild into the world of men (for example, attacking the cattle), and by men, who venture out of human society into the wild to hunt the bear. On their return, the hunters may be described as having blue eyebrows: blue is a stock indication of contact with the Otherworld, which may be conceived here specifically as heavenly regions (the blue of the sky). It is clear that the vertical axis of heaven–earth matches the horizontal one of forest–settlement, movement along one paralleling that along the other, so that, for example, the return of the slain bear to heaven up the pine tree beneath which its skull is buried also means its return to its progenitor, Hongotar (the tutelary female spirit of the pine tree), in the forest. The bear's wake was typically envisaged as a wedding, the bear being the bridegroom, eagerly awaited by the women at home as he is brought in from the hunt. Presenting a funeral as a wedding formed part of the subterfuge of the bear hunt, which involved convincing the bear he was well treated, particularly by those who had killed him, but it also marks the union of the bear with the human clan – something that was imagined to have taken place in a number of folktales. The bear, then, is essentially a transgressor of boundaries, belonging both to the wild and to human society, and this transgressivity is passed down to his descendants, who themselves have the ability to pass into the Otherworld of the forest and even, as *tietäjät* (magical practitioners), into the Otherworld of the spirits, just as the bear passed between the wild and the settlement, and between heaven and earth.

Given the Finnish propensity for transferring the imagery of one genre of poetry to another, it is scarcely surprising to find that the hunt also acted as a metaphor for wooing, the girl being seen as the prey – pictured as a goose, teal, and so forth – that is won. The local festivals attended by young men were 'girl forests' – the forest Otherworld whence prey was hunted – and on his return from this 'forest' a young man would fire off his gun and declare 'now we have a catch'. The liminality of the hunt also signalled

the change in status and the concomitant physical journey to a new home, undertaken by the girl as she became a wife. The emotional impact of this move is the topic of much Finnish lyrical poetry, told from a female perspective (Tarkka 2013, p. 263). In epic verse, the hero's courtship was linked to the mythic journey to the Otherworld; Tarkka (2013, p. 262) merely notes this is a reflection of the popularity of the Otherworld journey, which has been incorporated into the wooing verses, but this rather misses the point: marriage is a transition between worlds, both personally and socially, and the Otherworld journey acts as an image of this. The Otherworld and hunt are brought together in *The Wooing Contest*, where the hero declares he is going to Pohjola to hunt ducks, which stands for the purpose he finally reveals, to woo the maiden of Pohjola. The girl is secured, then, from a sort of Otherworld; but from her perspective, she passes into the Otherworld, leaving her childhood domesticity: hence a wedding was also imbued with the imagery of the funeral, the bride's departure from her childhood home being presented as a sort of death, with the in-laws pictured like denizens of the graveyard. Conversely and consequently, a funeral could also be imagined as a wedding, as happens most graphically in the bear-wake rites. After her departure from her own home, the bride remained for ever an exile in the Otherworld of her husband's kin.

3.4 Shamanic aspects

Northern hunting societies with a developed symbolism of the forest are also typically shamanic. Traditional Finnish society was not obviously shamanic, yet it preserved remnants of shamanism (Siikala 2002, ch. 1; she notes that many of the characteristic features of Siberian shamanism cannot be directly traced in Finnish materials). It was the tale of Vipunen, indeed – the topic of Miihkali's verse with which I began this section – which inspired Martti Haavio in 1950 to trace these remnants and show the underlying shamanic elements in certain Finnish myths. The purpose of visits to the Otherworld in classic shamanism is practical: some of the primary examples are the initiation experience of the shaman, performed by spirits in the Otherworld, and visits by the shaman to retrieve the soul of a patient. Such classically shamanic Otherworld visits are absent from recorded Finnish tradition, either as a result of prehistoric changes in society from one in which they indeed once existed, or because they were never present at all. Yet myths such as the visit to Vipunen may be seen as transformed versions of such shamanic visits, transmuted through the passage of time or through borrowing from classically shamanic neighbouring peoples such as the Sámi. The clearest surviving example of a visit to Tuonela is when the seer, Väinämöinen, breaks his sleigh on the way to church (hence, a sort of journey to the spiritual Otherworld), and he seeks out the tools to mend it in the realm of death, Tuonela. This song was often combined with Vipunen's song, in which, as noted, Väinämöinen consulted with the long-dead sage Vipunen to get the words necessary to complete his boat. Yet the arduous journey to the dead here acts rather as an elaborate metaphor for the power of

song, with the otherworldly scenery providing a spatial representation of supranormal knowledge. Hence, the originally shamanic journey has been transformed into a metaphorical journey representing the acquisition of poetic skill. Nonetheless, the visit to the dead may still preserve something of its original practical purpose: in another myth, Väinämöinen needs to seek the words necessary to heal his knee wound from the Otherworld, which is in line with shamanic visits to the Otherworld to effect means of healing for patients, even if it has already transmuted into a search for words.

3.5 The creative knee

The Singer's Words quoted at the beginning indeed make a point of the knee – ostensibly rather prosaically, if in a manner slightly puzzling to the modern reader. The *kirjokansi*, or multi-coloured lid, that is stretched across the knees refers to the lid of the Sampo and hence to its creative power as a source of words, but the *kansi* is also surely the *kantele*, the traditional zither played by singers across their knees, whose music releases the power of the words sung (the words are probably related to each other and to *kannus*, a term for the shamanic drum: Siikala 2002, pp. 36–37). Yet the knee itself is of crucial mythic significance. The knee of Väinämöinen, swimming in the ocean, was the resting place for the egg from which the world was made in various redactions of *The Creation* (e.g. *SKVR* VII_1 18, sung by Iivana Shemeikka from Suistamo in 1893). As in Indo-European languages, where 'give birth' derives from the word for 'knee' (as in Latin *gigno* and *genu*), so in Finnish the word for knee, *polvi*, gives rise to the word for generation, (*suku*)*polvi*. So the primordial 'knee' gives birth to the world through the egg brooded upon it (cf. Tarkka 2013, p. 192); the egg's shattering is paralleled by that of the Sampo. Like the Sampo, the *kantele* in some versions of its origin myth had to be retrieved from the otherworldly Pohjola. Hence the knee is the site of creativity *par excellence*, here in the metonymic sense of poetic creativity. The knee is also the vulnerable part of the body that suffers in the healing charm poem, *The Wound* (e.g. *SKVR* XII_1 62). Väinämöinen is, again, building a boat when he injures his knee and cannot staunch the blood; he has to find a healer, who boasts of his healing powers by evoking his presence at the creation of the world (Tarkka 2013, p. 192), and Väinämöinen's blood and body are compared to the landscape that the healer claims to have shaped in primordial time. The knee therefore is a sort of metonym of creativity, which is stalled when the knee is injured.

3.6 The Sampo and Iðunn

Finns and Norsemen lived in proximity throughout prehistory and on into modern times, and it is scarcely surprising to find a certain degree of similarity in their narratives, whether this be a result of borrowing or a reflection of shared areal features

whose genesis is more difficult to define. I will mention just one myth in this connection: the abduction of Iðunn by the giant Þjazi and her subsequent return, a tale recounted by Þjóðólfr in his *Haustlǫng*. Iðunn, the goddess who provides the gods with the antidote to old age (identified by Snorri as apples) to preserve their youth, corresponds to the mead of poetry: both are invaluable commodities which the gods need but lose to the Otherworld and must retrieve. Both myths are variant realisations of this one basic theme, with a different emphasis on the specific form and nature of the treasure which is lost, Iðunn here being closer to the archetypal source of immortality. Giantland is productive mainly of one thing: females for the gods (even when, as in Iðunn's case, those females have in fact first been abducted to giantland). The securing of the mead of poetry from the giant Suttungr, and of the cauldron of Ægir from Hymir, are thus somewhat exceptional in that the object of the quest is not a female. Nonetheless, females take leading roles in these myths too, notably Gunnlǫð, who actually secures the mead for Óðinn – she is its guardian, just as Iðunn is guardian of the apples of youth. Yet we do not have any explicit connection between Iðunn and poetic inspiration: seeking out such a connection calls for a comparison with Finnish sources.

The myth of Iðunn is so close in narrative terms to the theft of the Sampo that one underlying shared narrative almost certainly underlies both myths.[18] It is therefore worth discussing it briefly to show how such a shared narrative is developed in neighbouring cultures. Here is my summary of the points of comparison:

Loki, held hostage by giant in eagle form,	Väinämöinen, stranded in Pohjola,
promises to deliver Iðunn,	promises to deliver the maker of the
source of fecundity, to giantland	Sampo, source of fecundity, to Pohjola
and is released.	and is released.
Loki tricks Iðunn into going to Þjazi,	Väinämöinen tricks Ilmarinen into going to Pohjola
luring her with new apples.	with the promise of wooing a girl there.
Iðunn is playmate to the giant.	Ilmarinen makes the Sampo for Pohjola.
Loki steals back Iðunn.	Väinämöinen steals the Sampo.
Þjazi follows as an eagle	The mistress of Pohjola follows as a wyvern
and is killed trying to retrieve Iðunn.	and is debilitated trying to retrieve the Sampo.

Now, the Sampo, unlike Iðunn or her apples, was, as we have seen, very much a symbol of poetic power, so the salvation of the Sampo from Pohjola signified not just the securing of harvest welfare, which was perhaps the primary meaning within this agrarian culture, but also the securing of poetic fecundity from the Otherworld. The two traditions have thus developed the various mythic variants of one basic motif with somewhat different emphases.

18 This topic is currently being researched by Frog for future publication.

That different values are assigned to motifs is also apparent elsewhere. The Iðunn myth begins with what might at a push be described as a hunt, in that the gods secure themselves an ox to eat in the wilderness.[19] In Finnish tradition the imagery of the forest and hunt encompasses a complex series of opposed worlds and Otherworlds. In Germanic tradition, by contrast, this developed imagery, which is characteristic of hierarchically undeveloped societies that rely on the hunt, appears to be largely absent: when hunts take place, they are simply a means of securing some food, with no more than practical implications. It might, however, be argued that there are hints of something more in the opening of *Haustlǫng*. The 'hunt' takes place in the wilderness, hence an Otherworld; moreover, it caused problems: the denizen of the region, the giant Þjazi, will not allow it to cook, and this starts a series of calamities for the gods. From a hunting world view perspective, the divine hunters could be seen as having failed to propitiate the spirit master of the fauna, suffering misfortune as a result. Yet, while the motif of the securing of nourishment, and its elixir, Iðunn's antidote to old age, is a recurrent motif in the myth, the underlying world view is scarcely one of circumpolar hunting reciprocity. The hunt is also used as a metaphor for wooing in Finnish tradition, and in a sense Iðunn is hunted as prey in the Norse myth. Yet this is not the imagery that is expounded in the poem; rather, she is a *leika*, a 'plaything' or 'doll', passed between the gods and giants. Her sojourn in giantland is not dwelt on as a form of exile (let alone one seen from a female perspective, as in Finnish poetry), even if this is patently what it is; the attitude is rather one of exploitation – Iðunn is only considered in terms of her usefulness to the contending parties.

4 Siberia: Shamanism

Traditional Finnish culture was, as might be expected, more closely linked than the Nordic to circumpolar cultures rooted, to varying degrees, in hunting and shamanism. Among the Finns' geographical and linguistic neighbours, the Sámi, who in medieval times occupied much of modern-day Finland and northern Scandinavia, a form of classic shamanism existed (admittedly, it appears in somewhat depleted form by the time of most of our records from the seventeenth century on). Finnish culture was not classically shamanic, but elements of shamanism have been identified as part of the tradition. The visit to the Otherworld by the shaman is characteristic of classic circumpolar shamanism and is found among the Sámi, though among the Finns the motif plays a much smaller role.

However, the presence of visits to the Otherworld does not equate to the presence of shamanism, which, as Vajda pointed out as long ago as 1959, is a complex of

19 See below for a different perspective on the myth, viewing it as a variant of the Indo-European cattle raid.

phenomena occurring in tandem. Ancient Nordic culture was not clearly shamanic in the classic sense – in fact, it is almost possible to say that it was clearly not shamanic (the proviso being that our extant evidence is simply too scant to allow for a firm conclusion); this in essence is the view I adopt in my lengthy study of 2009. I am not aware of a similarly critical study covering the breadth of Celtic traditions and texts, but a similar conclusion seems plausible; shamanism is frequently adduced in Celtic studies contexts, not always critically.[20] The study by Nagy (1981), however, is more perceptive. He looks at the tale of Finn's visit to an Otherworld, *bruidhean*, or dwelling and points out a number of shamanic features. Useful as Nagy's study is, the degree to which it is helpful to view Finn as shamanic remains open to question. Finn goes into a swoon, like a shaman perhaps, but it is his horses, not himself, which are consumed in the Otherworld and then resurrected. He gains spiritual knowledge but is not guided into it in the Otherworld and is not initiated into acting as a shaman in his community. Overall, the intent is to show the Otherworld as the antithesis of this – the food is inedible, animosity is presented as hospitality, and so forth – which is scarcely shamanic. Other tales show Finn or his men being spitted and roasted or thrown into a pot and cooked, yet they do not act as clear initiation rites, lacking in particular the social setting and function of shamanism. Thus the Otherworld has a traditional role of being the antithesis of this and is a source of power and knowledge, but it is characterised differently than in classic shamanism. In Welsh tradition, it is probably Giraldus's *awenyddion* (discussed below, pp. 499–501) that come closest to shamans, in that they entered trance and were able to expound what they experienced there. Yet trance and the power of prophecy resulting from it do not in themselves constitute shamanism; again, the social dimension appears to be lacking with *awenyddion* (though the limited information leaves us without any clarity on this) – if, indeed, they existed in any form more concrete than a figment of poetic tradition.

Adopting a critical approach to the presence of actual shamanism, defined in anything other than a loose and hence uninformative manner, does not mean, however, that we must eschew the recognition that motifs, and understanding of motifs, might be shared across societies with rather different social and religious make-ups. Classic forms of shamanism distil certain features of vocation and inspiration derived from

20 For example, Melia (1983) argues that the story of Adomnán fasting to death and resurrecting in the *Cáin Adomnáin* reflects an ancient Indo-European custom, found also in India, carried out to force an opponent to yield; Adomnán is fasting against God to secure a benefit. It may well be that the tradition is ancient – the element of self-sacrifice is found also in Norse tradition in Óðinn's sacrifice on the tree in *Hávamál*, st. 138–142, for example – but there is nothing particularly shamanic about it, *pace* Melia's assertions; his argument that the Irish rite is evidence for shamanism having been borrowed by proto-Indo-Europeans and passed down to the Celts and Indians is therefore without foundation in this context (however likely it may be deemed as an explanation of a wider context of supposed shamanic features within Indo-European traditions). More worthwhile, however, is Nagy's article of 1981, which takes a more nuanced view of shamanic aspects of the Finn stories, in a way that is illuminating rather than deterministic.

the Otherworld, almost into Platonic ideal forms. Such experiences are endemic to almost all human societies, but the essence of the experience may be highlighted through comparison.

The shaman (unlike for example the oral poet *qua* poet – though the roles of seer and poet may coincide) is someone set apart from society, a separation marked by the manner of initiation. The initiate is often distinguished by a serious illness, which leads, against his or her will, to being called by the spirits. A journey into the wilderness often takes place, but this reflects the visit to the Otherworld of the spirits, where the initiation typically involves the dual aspects of inspiration (the granting of shamanic powers) and rebirth, symbolised for example by the imagined physical remaking of the shaman. After the initiation the shaman has the knowledge to deal with spirits and becomes a bearer of the shamanic tradition, which involves intimate knowledge and manipulation of the traditions of the tribe, often enunciated in poetic or otherwise mantic form.

It is not the shaman's concern to wrest poetic inspiration from the Otherworld: his contact with the Otherworld is geared towards practical purposes, to ward off threats to the welfare of his community. Yet his task involves making irrealities – the Otherworld – real,[21] and the expression of his craft is thus inherently comparable to poetry. The shaman does not move, yet he travels to the Otherworld:[22] the journey itself is therefore an irreality made real through the shaman's experience and his accompanying portrayal of it; the journey is thus figurative, an artefact of poetic symbolism. This principle is observable in many of the expressions of shamanic activity: thus the drum is identified as the reindeer from whose pelt it was made, on which the shaman rides to the Otherworld, or as the tree from which its frame was made, which stands as a metonym of the world tree, beneath whose roots the Otherworld lies and to which access is hence possible through the tree-become-drum (cf. Siikala 2002, pp. 44, 268; also Siikala 1992, where the drum is pictured as a boat to journey to the Otherworld on). To maintain his position of respect within the community, the shaman needed to be master of the shared traditions relating to the Otherworld, in the sense

21 Compare Humphrey (1996, p. 38), who notes of the Daur shaman that his song relates impossible things like a blind lynx, because the shaman has knowledge of impossible realities; such shamanic encounters with irrealities may easily be paralleled elsewhere, as when the Chukchi shaman Nuwat declared he saw the calamitous clash of the waxing and waning moon (Siikala 2002, p. 63). Humphrey notes that these descriptions are not metaphors as such: they are portrayals of things that cannot exist, imagined as existing. Poetry itself might similarly be said to portray the non-existent (if not necessarily the impossible) as if it existed, so there is at least a broad comparability between the shaman's and the poet's expressive craft.

22 A journey to the Otherworld, however, forms only one means of contact: Siikala (1978, pp. 322–323) notes that contact may take place also in this world, or in both this world and the Otherworld. Siikala (1992) discusses two shamanic songs of the Chukchi recorded close to each other, one of which involves calling the spirits to the shaman, the other a journey to the Otherworld, noting that these different approaches could exist alongside each other.

of demonstrating both intimate knowledge and command over it, manipulating the Otherworld to the benefit of the community (cf. Siikala 1992, p. 51). Even if his aim was to raid the Otherworld for broadly healing purposes, rather than for poetic inspiration, his manifestation of his command over this irreal world beyond the ken of ordinary folk, expressible only through figurative language, was realised in forms of narrative expression which recognised and manipulated tradition imaginatively in the same way as the works of poets. As we have seen elsewhere, here too it is the undertaking of the journey which amounts to its own fulfilment, in poetic terms at least (as distinct from the healing or utilitarian purpose of the journey, which may not be fulfilled): the journey is itself a figurative exercise constituting a poetic engagement with and manipulation of traditional lore, an imaginative exploit that is in itself functionally equivalent to a poem.

The shaman's visits to the Otherworld are distinguished from heroic visits there not so much in kind as in their purpose: the shaman seeks to manifest his duties and the source of his power (Siikala 2002, p. 301). He does this through achieving various tasks, in particular by retrieving the soul, the life principle, of someone who has fallen ill (Siikala 1978, p. 323); the wresting away of a soul is not far removed from the wresting of *awen*, poetic inspiration. The interrelationship between shamans' accounts of their exploits and the community's wider poetic traditions has often not been studied in depth: the majority of sources on classic shamanism derive from a time when such contextualisation was not felt necessary. Nonetheless, the example of the Finnish *tietäjä* ('knower', 'seer'), functionally comparable to the classic shaman, may be cited: as Siikala notes (2002, p. 109), the mythical world of epic verse and of the *tietäjä*'s incantations was the same, and the *tietäjä* would draw on motifs from or allusions to epic verse to expand the imagery used in charms. Such an interrelationship suggests all the more strongly that a shaman's expression of his mastery over the Otherworld might be looked on as equivalent to a poet's verbal mastery over that figurative world. Moreover, the role of shaman and poet may come together in one individual: in Finnish tradition, Väinämöinen, as noted, undertakes broadly shamanic exploits, and is also given the constant epithet of *tietäjä*, but he also inaugurates music through the invention of the *kantele* (e.g. *SKVR* XII_1 75, Ostrobothnia, *c*. 1760; *SKVR* VII_1 547a, Ontrei Vanninen, Sortavala, 1882). Finnish tradition thus preserves motifs reflecting archaic shamanistic notions, but soul-loss ceased to be a prevalent idea in prehistory, and along with this change, visits to the Otherworld changed in character. The clearest example of a visit to the realm of death is when Väinämöinen seeks out the tools thence to mend his broken sleigh, discussed above (p. 482).

Whilst for the shaman the demonstration of his power may be a primary experience, this would be of no value if it could not be mediated: for his community, the proof of this power is seen in the description the shaman utters. Hence descriptive (or poetic) skill equates to a demonstration of power for the audience, and the degree of power may be said to correspond to the degree of poetic skill in describing it. This is perhaps not quite as self-referential as with 'pure' poets, whose ability to describe

the quest for poetic inspiration in itself determined the success of a mission whose fruit was this very ability to describe the quest, yet it is close. An example of a demonstration of a shaman's skill was recorded by Bogoras among the Chukchi;[23] here, the shaman Nuwat recounts his visit to the Otherworld, describing how his boat (a reference to the shamanic drum) is swifter in flight than birds as it goes, guided by spirits, to other worlds. The shaman identifies himself with one flying in the darkness, while his own body, turned into an old tree stump, falls by the way on a headland. He declares his song is beautiful, and his spirits gather knowledge from all about, like birds gathering food to their nest. He then describes his visit to the Otherworld. He has returned from inside the earth like the horn of a devil's deer (a mammoth) when it digs a hole out of a river bank; his feet have walked on the back side of the sky; he was invisible, but could see around him: he saw the waxing moon crash against the waning, and one of them fall down dead; he saw East vie with West over a bone-filled chasm; he saw the spirits of the Northern Lights play ball; he saw the mistress of the world exuding beavers from her nostrils and handing them out. (These are but some of the extraordinary visions that he related.)

Nuwat's declaration that his song is beautiful surely marks an identification of his poetic skill with his shamanic ability. His visit to the Otherworld results in a poetically charged account, which also appears to be imbued with prophetic potency: his culminating revelation, that the lady of the earth (the mistress of the hunt) is producing an abundance of sought-after beavers, shows the poet-shaman has secured his booty from the Otherworld.

5 Greece: The cattle raid

The notion of a raid for poetic inspiration is somewhat abstract. Hence it is natural to find treasure, an expected object of a raid, standing as a metaphor for poetic power. Yet, if we seek to uncover very ancient roots to the theme of the raid, then treasure itself is somewhat abstract: the expression of wealth was primarily in the form of cattle, a point reflected for example in Latin *pecunia* ('money'), being derived from *pecus* ('cattle'; cognate with English *fee*). The prototypical raid, then, consists of the forcible theft of an outsider's cattle. As a legendary/mythological theme the cattle raid almost certainly forms part of an ancient Indo-European heritage, and it is found widely in Indo-European traditions.[24] It is familiar, for example, from Irish sources, most notably the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*.

23 The text was subsequently published in German by Findeisen (1956); cf. Siikala's discussion (2002, pp. 62–63), and her fuller analysis, Siikala 1992.

24 The Indo-European cattle raid myth is discussed for example by Lincoln (1976), who does not, however, bring the *Hymn to Hermes* into the argument. The prototypical Indo-European form envisaged by

In ancient Greece, the mythological victim of cattle raids is often the god Apollo. One text where the raid is a central narrative component is the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*. In a perceptive analysis, Johnston (2003) shows how the infant Hermes is brought into full membership of the divine pantheon through his raid on Apollo's cattle: the cattle raid here, as in other Indo-European traditions, notably Indian and Irish, functioned as a means for a youth to show his prowess and hence be seen as worthy of admittance to adulthood. By the time of the composition of the *Hymn to Hermes*, such raids were merely legendary, but the motif provided a traditional imagery to present the transition from youth to adulthood. Hermes is rewarded by being accepted into full status among the gods when he presents the lyre he has invented to Apollo. The connection is that in the traditional warrior band, the lyre would accompany songs of heroic exploits (symbolised by the cattle raid) which the young men would sing. Being able to sing these songs was therefore another symbolic representation of accession to the adult *comitatus*. There is thus an equivalence in the symbolism of this accession. The cattle raid is a raid by an outsider on what is to him an 'Otherworld', that of neighbouring foes; in the Greek case, this Otherworld object of the raid is in fact the *comitatus* to which the raider is admitted as a member after proving his prowess. At the same time, the raid acts as a metaphor for the gaining of poetic inspiration and the ability to sing heroic exploits, which marks out the member of the *comitatus*. In the *Hymn to Hermes*, this gift is, as Johnston points out, highlighted in that before the raid the infant Hermes is able to sing only what he knows, his birth and life with his mother, but afterwards his competence expands to cover the cosmic themes of the divine hierarchy, as set out in lines 427–433:

> he spoke authoritatively of the immortal gods and of dark Earth, how they were born originally and how each received his portion. Remembrance first of the gods he honored in his song, the mother of the Muses, for she had Maia's son in her province, and then the rest of the immortal gods Zeus' splendid son honored according to seniority and affilitation, relating everything in due order, and playing the lyre that hung from his arm.

Johnston regards the gift of the lyre as perhaps an updating of the traditional cattle raid to make the story more relevant to the audience of the hymn, but the metaphorical equivalence of the cattle raid and the gift of poetry could have been realised at any time when the tradition of the cattle raid (not necessarily real cattle raids, be it noted) and the feast of adults recounting heroic exploits existed alongside each other.

Lincoln involves a contest by a hero, Tritos, 'Third' (the other two members of the 'trinity' being 'Man' and 'Twin', who engage in a primordial sacrifice, Man slaying Twin along with a cow, and thus create the world and the social orders of human society), against a three-headed serpent being who steals cattle. The Greek myth of Hermes differs from this in several aspects – though Apollo, the slayer of the serpentine Python, could be seen as a divine inversion of the serpentine monster. It becomes clear that the cattle raid could form the theme of various myths, which shared some but not all motifs: it could be varied in tradition to serve different purposes.

Despite its apparently well-rooted antiquity, the presence of the cattle raid in Germanic myth is peculiarly muted. In Norse, it arguably forms part of the myth of Iðunn and Þjazi, discussed above. Here, a threesome of gods on an expedition in the wild seize some cattle for food and proceed to cook their prey, whereupon a giant in eagle shape stops the cooking from proceeding and demands his share: he consumes the whole ox. Loki, the trickster, is abducted by Þjazi, until he promises the giant the goddess Iðunn. The contest with a monstrous giant over cattle is perhaps derived ultimately from the Indo-European Tritos myth, but in other respects there is greater similarity to the Hermes myth: Hermes, like Loki, is presented as very much a deceitful trickster, covering up what he has done and more or less lying about it; he slaughters and cooks two of the cows he steals but is unable to eat them, much as he wants to – not because of magical intervention by a giant figure, but because he is divine and therefore does not consume mortal food. He is abducted by the owner of the cattle, Apollo, who does not believe a word of his protestations of innocence, until he promises to return the stolen prey. It is difficult to determine whether the similarities represent a shared Indo-European tradition adhering to this variant form of the cattle raid, or if they are coincidental reflections of independently developed traditions, or indeed if the Norse myth is based in part on Greek traditions.[25] Be that as it may, the Hermes myth shows how the cattle raid could be linked to the theme of poetic inspiration, whereas the Iðunn myth, using comparable motifs, does not pursue this theme but is linked rather to the theme of the theft of ambrosia (of which Iðunn is guardian).

6 Wales: The cauldron of poetry

6.1 Poetic inspiration (*awen*) and the figure of Taliesin

Poetic inspiration has a particular name in Welsh, *awen*.[26] The word is related to English *wind*, as well as to Welsh *gwawd* ('poetry') and Irish *fáth* ('poetry'); the name of the Old Norse god of poetry, Óðinn, also derives from this root.[27] The earliest reference to

25 I argue elsewhere (Tolley 2015b) that classical stories may have influenced the myth in other respects; the potential role of the Goths, occupiers or sustainers of both Eastern and Western Roman Empires, as mediators of classical traditions to the wider Germanic world should not be underestimated.

26 The brief account of *awen* here is based on Koch (2006, s.v. *Awen*).

27 The etymological links are widely accepted in dictionaries and elsewhere, though some details of the wider Indo-European background are contentious. For example, Wagner (1970) notes some difficulty in the interpretation of Irish *fáth*, which he takes to mean rather 'matter, subject of poetry', and upon this builds a different etymology, based on the root for 'weave'. Weaving may constitute a concrete activity acting as a metaphor for poetic composition – this is found widely in Finnish folk

awen is in the 'Memorandum of the Five Poets' in the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*, ascribed to Nennius, where (Nennius §62) the poet Talhaearn has the epithet *Tataguen* ('Father of *awen*'): *Tunc Talhaern Tataguen in poemate claruit; et Neirin, et Taliessin, et Bluchbard, et Cian qui, vocatur Gweinth Guaut, simul uno tempore in poemate Brittannico claruerunt* ("Then Talhaearn, the father of poetic inspiration [*awen*], was renowned in poetry. And at the same time, [A]neirin, Taliesin, Bluchbardd, and Cian, who is called 'wheat [reading *gwenith*] (of) song', were famous in Welsh poetry"; Ford 1992, p. 1).

In later Welsh tradition, it is Taliesin, mentioned in this list, rather than Talhaearn, who is *par excellence* associated with the poetic gift.[28] By the time of the composition of the poems of the Book of Taliesin (before the fourteenth century) he had become a generic figure, "a court poet writ large" (Haycock 2015, p. 10), and a vehicle for a wide range of poetic aspirations. Yet Taliesin the demiurge of poetry grew out of Taliesin the Nennian poet of the Hen Gogledd (the Old North), the once Welsh areas of northern England. The Hen Gogledd, as Welsh tradition developed, became a fantasy world, full of fantastical beings and legendary places (Haycock 2015, pp. 169–170); hence Taliesin's origin there characterises him, within poetic tradition, not so much as a historical poet as an otherworldly being, in line with his being born not of a mother and father but of nine elements (fruits, flowers, earth, water of the ninth wave, etc.), as related in *Kat Godeu*, lines 151–152.[29] The Hen Gogledd – lost to the English – thus comes to parallel the legendary lands of Maes Gwyddno, lost to the sea (first mentioned in the mid-thirteenth-century Black Book of Carmarthen); in the *Ystoria Taliesin*, the lord of these lands, Gwyddno Garanhir, was father to Taliesin's patron, Elphin, and thus the poet's otherworldly persona is further affirmed. The otherworldly nature of *awen* is asserted through the otherworldliness of its chief bearer, Taliesin.

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poetry, for instance – but Wagner does not provide any strong evidence for this in the Celtic area, and still less in the Germanic. As a concomitant of this etymology, he rejects a connection between *Óðinn* and *óðr* as an adjective, 'mad', an association he regards as a late folk-etymology. The weaving etymology is not, to my knowledge, generally accepted, and Wagner ignores various senses of the recorded Germanic words (see n. 2 for references to my discussions of these), as well as the widespread link found between poetry/prophecy and madness. There are better ways to seek to explain the small difficulties with the Irish terms than to seek to overturn a well-established etymological framework spread across a range of languages.

28 Haycock (2015, p. 12) suggests that the poet-persona of Taliesin formed in part as a retort to Gildas's excoriation of the court poets of Maelgwn, who are condemned as infidel yes-men to a fratricide: thus Taliesin trounced Maelgwn's poets and proved himself adept at Christian learning. Nennius's focus on Talhaearn in the ninth century, several centuries after Gildas, would seem to indicate the appropriation of the poetic persona by Taliesin must have been a protracted process.

29 The poem is found in the Book of Taliesin collection (National Library of Wales, MS Peniarth 2, dating from the early fourteenth century: Haycock 2015, p. 1), as are *Angar Kyfundawt* and *Preideu Annwfyn*, discussed later.

At its most basic, the securing of *awen* appears to have been similar in both Welsh and Norse tradition: Taliesin is pictured in *Angar Kyfundawt*, lines 179–180, as drawing *awen* 'out of the depths', as Óðinn drew the mead from the depths of Suttungr's mountain: *Awen a ganaf, o dwfyn ys dygaf* ('I sing inspiration, I bring it forth from the depth'). This basic image is, however, developed by other poets. Thus Llywarch ap Llywelyn (also known as Prydydd y Moch, fl. 1173–1220) compares his divine inspiration to that derived from the cauldron of Ceridfen (or Ceridwen):[30]

Duw douyt dym rit retun awen ber	The Lord God gives to me the gift of sweet inspiration
ual o beir kerrituen	As from the cauldron of Ceridfen.

These lines represent the earliest linking of three themes (Haycock 2015, p. 14): *awen* or poetic inspiration, the cauldron, and the cauldron's female guardian, to which I return later.

Treatments of *awen* in medieval poetry, even when it forms a focus of attention, are invariably allusive and usually riddling: it seems to be a central tenet that poetry could only be talked about poetically;[31] one might even say mantically. An example is the *Angar Kyfundawt*, one of the most impenetrable poems of the Book of Taliesin.[32] The speaker is again Taliesin, and the poem is a boast of his knowledge and poetic powers (in the face of opposition from a band of other poets, it seems); this is demonstrated in large measure through a series of statements or questions about what he knows, reflecting the pre-modern notion that poetic skill included what we might more readily term information. Yet the individual statements made are often obscure and difficult to penetrate. Higley (1993, p. 213) suggests the obscurity is deliberate, intended to act as a manifestation of Taliesin's powers of obfuscation – "it is almost as if the text mocks our efforts today with its insistent allusions to its own private nature". This is surely correct, to a point – poetry is intended to be essentially unfathomable in its workings and to touch the threads of an interlocking network of allusion rather than to present a simple narrative – yet Haycock points out (2015, p. 106) that a good deal of the obscurity may result from textual corruption and our own inability, removed from the culture that produced the poem, to fully discern what lies behind much of the word-play.

The obscure nature of poetry is possibly declared in lines 11–12, though the text has required emendation:

30 Cited by Koch (2006, s.v. *Awen*).

31 On what constitutes 'the poetic', see the introduction.

32 Higley (1993, p. 211) notes: "it mixes archaic with later Welsh; it has little regard for metrical regularities; it is full of neologisms, casual about syntax; it seems to omit words, perhaps whole passages; it has long strings of statements that are almost simplistic in their clarity, followed by verses of such obscurity that there seems to be no hope of unraveling them." Clearly, any attempt to summarise or extract prosaically rational interpretations from the poem must remain both tentative and untrue to its probably deliberate obscurity.

By lleith bit [ardu],	Until death it shall be obscure –
areith Auacdu:	Afagddu's declamation:
neus duc yn geluyd	skilfully he brought forth
kyureu ar gywyd.	speech in metre.

Having mentioned Afagddu, the poet then brings in Gwiawn, who probably represents an embodiment of Taliesin himself (lines 15–18):

Gwiawn a leferyd,	[It is] Gwiawn who utters,
adwfyn dyfyd;	a profound one shall come;
gwnaei o varw vyw	he would bring the dead to life,
ac aghyfoeth yw.	and [yet] he is poor.

While this may be a prophecy of Christ, it is surely also a statement of what poetry itself achieves, and there appears to be an allusion to the poor lad Gwion, reborn as the poet Taliesin (discussed below, pp. 513 ff.). *Awen* is the outpouring of a cauldron and is thus something 'alive' derived from a vessel holding dead things; the poets' cauldrons are mentioned in the very next line, 'making their cauldrons' being a metaphor for 'working their materials', as expressed in line 21. Lines 75–84 present *awen* as bestowed by 'him' (Christ is to be understood). In its various divisions, it was created in Annwfyn, the Otherworld – this is stated thrice, but then it is said to be made in the air above the earth; in other words, it has a heavenly origin. As noted, lines 179–180. again present it as brought from the depth: yet this too is a play on words, for the poet mentions a 'profound' one not only in line 16,[33] but also in lines 24 (song will be brought forth by a profound – *dyfynwedyd* – speaker, in reference either to the poet, or possibly to Christ) and 33 (a profound one – *dwfyn* – made flesh): to say that *awen* is brought from the depths is to say that it is profound. In lines 243–260, which form part of a longer monologue in which Taliesin proclaims a long list of things that he has been, the poet appears to identify himself with the grain which is brewed into beer, in a John Barleycorn type transformation (this is the reading of Haycock 2015, pp. 164–165): the implication is that *awen* is comparable with intoxicating drink, a view which is implicit too in the Norse image of poetic inspiration as mead. Yet Taliesin, the archetypal bearer of *awen*, here seems to become one with *awen* itself: this calls to mind the Norse Kvasir, who is the embodiment of poetic skill and learning, and whose blood is brewed into the mead of poetry. We no longer have any Norse poetic source detailing this personification and transformation, however, as we do with Taliesin.

Lines 229–264 form the culmination of the poem, in which Taliesin lists his many transformations, concluding with the declaration that his praise poetry will last for ever. He begins:

33 However, Haycock notes that *adwfyn* here could stand for *o dwfyn*, in which case Gwiawn is coming and uttering verse 'from the depths', as in lines 179–180.

Eil gweith y'm rithat:	I was transformed a second time:
bum glas gleissat,	I was a blue salmon,
bum ki, bum hyd,	I was a dog, I was a stag,
bum iwrch ymynyd,	I was a roebuck on the mountain,
bum kyff, bum raw ...	I was a block, I was a spade ...

Similar aretalogies, first-person lists of what Taliesin has been and what actions he has taken part in, form two extended passages of *Kat Godeu*, which follows *Angar Kyfundawt* in the Book of Taliesin. Haycock (2015, p. 167) comments, "By 'being' an eagle or a serpent, he embodies the very metaphors of praise poetry". Presence at actions or identity with things that are sung is an assertion of authority; Higley (1993, p. 194) notes: "The Welsh tradition, especially as we find it in *The Book of Taliesin*, has roots within a pre-Christian concept of the poet who calls upon a secret language that links him with the unknowable forces of the cosmos". We might also compare how the Finnish healer arrogates power to staunch Väinämöinen's wound through his primordial presence at the creation (p. 486). Yet we might invert the way we express this authority: the poet's *awen* enables him to create the verisimilitude of presence in the action described, and so the power of the poet's creativity is asserted. The claim of presence or identity is an arrogation of imaginative power masquerading as knowledge.

Taliesin's transmogrifications can be paralleled in Irish texts. The poet and leader of the Sons of Míl, Amairgein, on first setting foot in Ireland, utters the poem beginning:[34]

Am gāeth i m-muir,	I am Wind on Sea,
Am tond trethan,	I am Ocean-wave,
Am fuaim mara,	I am Roar of Sea,
Am dam secht ndīrend ...	I am Bull of Seven Fights ...

This is discussed by Rees and Rees (1978, pp. 98–99), who point out Indian parallels, where Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* declares he is the divine seed without which nothing animate or inanimate exists. "Potentially, the whole creation is bound up in Amairgen", they note: and it is bound up with him precisely in his appropriation of the new realm of Ireland for him and his descendants, the Irish who come to record his tale in later days. The Reeses also note (1978, pp. 96–97) how the Sons of Míl had to abandon their original possession of the land and reclaim it – withdrawing, under Amairgein's judgement, a space of a mere nine waves away before reclaiming it, surely a spatial metaphor for a reinvigorated rebirth after nine months. We thus have a poet – a creator (*poiētēs*) – appropriating power to himself through identification with the creation of which he sings and undergoing a creative (re)birth which results in appropriation of a new land, an Otherworld indeed, which is turned into the this-world of Ireland through the poetic and prophetic powers of Amairgein in overturning

34 *Lebor Gabála Érenn* vol. V, no. lxix, pp. 110–113.

the wizardry of the Túatha Dé Danann. Taliesin does not quite possess the land in the same way – we are not presented with the same notions of possessing the land by invasion. Rather, the Welsh saw themselves as being dispossessed of the land with which Taliesin is especially associated (see p. 495). Yet Taliesin is the embodiment of the poetry in which the traditions of Welshness are preserved – he is in a sense a *genius loci*. As discussed below, pp. 513 ff., he becomes this through a (re)birth, a transformation from poison to shining brow, in which he overcomes the witch Ceridwen, who is at once both his rival and his birth-giver (and hence his antecedent, as the Túatha Dé Danann are antecedents to the Sons of Míl, to whom they yield their sway).

6.2 Giraldus Cambrensis

The mantic and ecstatic nature of the gift of *awen* is unfolded in a passage from the late twelfth century by Giraldus Cambrensis in his *Descriptio Cambriae*, which purports to be factual rather than fictional and is potentially of importance for this reason (other sources on *awen* mainly being poetic). The account lacks some of the motifs associated with *awen* elsewhere, but the ritual contact with the Otherworld is emphasised strongly:[35]

> Sunt et in hoc Kambriæ populo, quod alibi non reperies, viri nonnulli, quos Awennithion vocant, quasi mente ductos. Hi super aliquo consulti ambiguo, statim frementes spiritu quasi extra se rapiuntur, et tanquam arreptitii fiunt. Nec incontinenti tamen quod desideratur edisserunt: sed per ambages multas, inter varios quibus effluunt sermones, nugatorios magis et vanos quam sibi cohærentes, sed omnes tamen ornatos, in aliquo demum verbi diverticulo qui responsum solerter observat quod petit accipiet enucleatum. Et sic denique de hac extasi tanquam a somno gravi ab aliis excitantur, et quasi per violentiam quandam ad se reverti compelluntur. Ubi et duo notanda reperies; quia post responsum, nisi violenter excitati et revocati, ab hujuscemodi quasi furore reverti non solent; et quod in se reversi, nihil horum omnium, quæ ab his interim prolata sunt, ad memoriam revocabunt. [Unde et, si forte super hoc iterum vel alio consulti dicere debeant, aliis omnino verbis et alienis enuntiabunt:] forsan sicut per phanaticos et energumenos spiritus interdum loquuntur, quanquam ignaros. Solent autem eis hæc dona plerumque in somnis per visiones infundi. Quibusdam enim videtur, quod eis vel lac dulce, vel mel in ore infundatur: aliis autem, quod eis schedula inscripta ori imponatur. Et statim a somno erecti, et canori effecti, se gratiam hanc suscepisse publice profitentur.
>
> (There are certain men among the people of Wales whom you will find nowhere else, called *awenyddion*, who are as it were led astray in mind. When consulted over something perplexing, they immediately start mumbling with their breath, as if they are taken out of themselves, and they become like those possessed. Yet they do not deliver what is sought to one who cannot restrain himself: one who is looking out shrewdly for a plain answer will get what he seeks in the end, but in some sort of word-twist, after many ramblings, in among the wandering enunciations these merge into, more trifling and vane than coherent, but all of them nonetheless embellished.

35 Giraldus Cambrensis: *Descriptio Cambriae* I.16, pp. 194–195.

> And so at last they are roused by others from this ecstasy as if from a deep sleep, and are forced to come back to themselves as if by violence. Here too you will find two things of note: after the answer, unless they are roused violently and called back, they do not return from this sort of delirium; and when they have come back to themselves, they cannot call to mind anything of all the matters which had been revealed by them. [Hence, if it happens that they have to speak when consulted over this or another matter again, they will speak out using completely different and non-matching expressions:] perhaps they speak sometimes as if through frenzied, but ignorant, spirits possessing them. These gifts are usually bestowed on them through visions in sleep. To some of them it seems that sweet milk or honey is being poured in their mouth; to others, that a written note is placed on their mouth. Rising from sleep, and made into singers, they announce publicly that they have received this favour.)

Giraldus's observations on *awenyddion* are, I believe, unparalleled and somewhat out on a limb as regards other records relating to *awen*. It seems unlikely, however, either that they are in the main his own invention or that he has derived them directly from any literary source. It is possible that some classical references, such as those noted in n. 87, were known to Giraldus; still more likely is that his visit to Ireland a few years before writing about Wales may have brought to his attention the tradition of poetic inspiration, *imbas forosnai* (described below, pp. 529–531), which involved a trance-like sleep to secure inspiration.[36] The balance of probability, however, is that his account of *awenyddion* has some basis in Welsh tradition, which itself exhibited features comparable to parallel traditions in Ireland.[37] However, given the lack of other evidence for contemporary *awenyddion* of this sort, this tradition is likely to have reflected an ideal, rather than any contemporary reality, of mantic inspiration, stemming probably from great antiquity – an ideal which has marked similarities to shamanic trance rituals. There are difficulties, however. Given that Welsh poetry was in reality a matter of complex craft following strict rules of composition undertaken by bards, the *awenyddion* were either a separate breed or else represented an idealisation of one aspect of poetic inspiration, the latter perhaps being the more likely (as indicated in the citation from Vaughan that is discussed at the end of this section). The disparity between the myth of poetic inspiration and the reality of poetic craftsmanship may, indeed, be described as a commonplace; it is evident, too, in the tale of Cædmon, who, *pace* Bede's account, must have gained the skills to compose in some more mundane fashion (see discussion below). There seems also to be a dichotomy between what Giraldus calls these practitioners and what they do. They are, by name, 'people [endowed] with *awen*', which, on the basis of other uses of *awen*,

36 Chadwick (1935, p. 133) notes this similarity, but does not consider the possibility that Giraldus could have exploited some familiarity with *imbas forosnai* in his depiction of the *awenyddion*.

37 The dream of Rhonabwy (in the late-fourteenth-century Red Book of Hergest), which occurs after he lies on an ox hide, is, as Chadwick notes (1935, p. 132), at least vaguely reminiscent. Also comparable is the statement Geoffrey of Monmouth puts in the mouth of Merlin in *Vita Merlini*, 1161–1166, where he says he was 'taken out of myself' (*raptus*) and saw the history of ancient peoples, and the future, and the secrets of nature. This in turn links to the aretalogical proclamations of Taliesin (see pp. 497–498).

should equate to 'poets', and they are said to be *cantori* ('gifted in song'), but their activity, as described, is purely that of a possessed medium as at a séance, who is asked to make contact with the Otherworld to secure answers to questions. While much Welsh poetry is vaticinatory,[38] it is difficult to countenance the notion that it was believed to have been delivered in a state of complete possession, at the behest of people seeking answers to particular problems, as described by Giraldus. Possibly the mode of interchange with the Otherworld was more varied than Giraldus indicates, with the *awenyddion* ranging from poets to mediums according to need, or else he has been influenced by depictions of mediums from elsewhere. We cannot know, but doubt must remain over the reliability or applicability of the detail of his account.

While there is no immediate contextual justification for Giraldus's mention of the inspired utterances of the *awenyddion*, we may note his fascination with political prophecy, which in the main began with Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Book of Merlin* (surviving as an authorial interpolation into book VII of his *Historia regum Britanniae*) some half a century earlier, itself presented as being of Welsh origin; Giraldus recounts, in his *Expugnatio Hibernica*, how he intended to include the prophecies of Merlin of Celidon as a third part to the work (but he failed to complete the task): these prophecies, the publication of which was much desired by Henry II, were found in a small book in Welsh, which Giraldus tracked down in a remote part of west Wales (Griffiths 1937, pp. 63 –64; Taylor 1911, p. 21). Henry, of course, was intent on controlling any expressions of political aspiration in this realm, which he was engaged in subduing. The *awenyddion*, then, exemplify the humbler background to the Welsh prophets who were coming to play a part in the politics of the realm: Giraldus's mention of them forms part of an overall picture of Wales as a source of vaticination of interest to the powers that be.

6.3 The cauldron

Ancient cauldrons have been excavated widely, from Norway to Bosnia and southern Italy, and from Ireland to Romania: a long-standing ritual symbolism is to be inferred.[39] The details of this symbolism would require a lengthy discussion, much of which would necessarily be contentious, given the lack of written testimony from prehistory; nonetheless, a few observations and inferences are worth making, with respect to cauldrons found in Celtic areas. The primary symbolism of the cauldron is

38 See, for example, the collection of prophetic poems from the Book of Taliesin edited by Haycock (2013).

39 This brief survey of cauldrons is based in part on Koch (2006, s.v. "Cauldron"). McGrath (2013) seeks to link the imagery of the cauldron with that of the life-giving well/spring, and sees the dismemberment (of food) in the cauldron as a re-enactment of the Indo-European primordial act of creative slaughter. While such ideas might be pertinent to the present discussion, MacGrath fails to provide anything like a cogent or detailed investigation, and as they stand her arguments are unconvincing.

clearly as a source of nourishment, hence of life; from this is likely to have developed the concept of it not merely sustaining life but bringing back life to the dead. The paradox of life and death united may be implied in the use of the poisonous wood of yew trees in the construction of some drinking vessels (Farley / Hunter 2015, p. 46); more obviously, the Gundestrup cauldron (*c*. 150–50 BC) features a female 'goddess' placing a warrior in a cauldron, arguably to be reborn into the procession which marches towards, then away from her (Farley / Hunter 2015, Fig. 258).[40]

As a narrative motif, the cauldron occurs in many forms in both Irish and Welsh traditions; for example, the Irish Otherworld ruler, the Dagda, had a great cauldron, one of the four treasures of the Túatha Dé Danann (as recorded in *The Four Jewels of the Túatha Dé Danann* in the late-fourteenth-century Yellow Book of Lecan), from which guests never departed unsatisfied.[41] In Welsh, probably partly under Irish influence, the cauldron appears prominently in texts such as *Branwen, Daughter of Llŷr*, and the poem *Preideu Annwfyn*. The cauldron as a source of poetic inspiration is a still more developed, metaphorical realisation of the concept of the cauldron of (re)birth: inspiration is 'nourished' and may be envisaged as coming from nowhere, being 'brought to life' from non-existence. The cauldron motif is traceable, in fact, in many Indo-European traditions as part of the ambrosia cycle, in which an Otherworld vessel holds a liquor of immortality and has to be wrested from giants or other deleterious beings. This wide topic cannot be investigated here, though it should be borne in mind that myths of gaining poetic inspiration from the Otherworld are often specialised refinements of the ambrosia myth.[42]

The *Mabinogion*[43] tale of *Branwen, Daughter of Llŷr*, features a cauldron which had been brought from Ireland, and was then given by the Welsh king, Blessed Brân

40 The Gundestrup cauldron is clearly an object with far-reaching cultural connections, found in Denmark, but almost certainly made by Thracians, featuring scenes which can sometimes be understood in terms of motifs recorded in later Celtic sources, but with apparent links as far as India. The female goddess of the cauldron is most readily associated with the Welsh Ceridwen (see p. 496), though Strabo's account of the priestesses of the Cimbri also comes to mind (p. 470). The procession to the goddess includes several carnyx players. The carnyx was a woodwind instrument, found primarily in Celtic areas, with a long neck reaching up to a head, held high above the player. They were used in battle, but also probably had ritual purposes, as well as making a frightful noise; their presence in the Gundestrup scene indicates a ritual association with sacrifice (and war was probably seen as a sacrificial consignment of the enemy to the gods).

41 The tradition recorded here is no doubt considerably more ancient – the matter is discussed by Hull in his edition, but in a fashion rather devoid of the critical approach to texts that would be expected today.

42 The classic study of the ambrosia cycle in a wide range of Indo-European traditions is Dumézil 1924, which remains of great value to this day, and, while supplemented by studies such as Doht 1974 for Germanic, is not superseded – though Dumézil's casual use of sources, often in unreliable versions, along with the developing ideological bias of his approach, always need to be borne in mind.

43 The earliest extant complete text of the *Mabinogion* is from the mid-fourteenth century, with parts of the Branwen tale recorded a century earlier; it is believed the tales were first written down between

(Bendigeidfran), as a dowry upon his sister Branwen's marriage to Matholwch, king of Ireland (who then recounts the cauldron's origin).[44] Ford (2008, p. 58) notes that the tale is probably a euhemerised version of the raid on the Otherworld, rendered here as a heroic expedition against Ireland to avenge the maltreatment meted out to Branwen there; yet the Otherworld appears also as the feasting hall of Harlech and then Gwales, where the Welsh comrades reside in bliss for seven, then eighty years, watched over by the head of their king, Brân.[45] The cauldron appears as a resurrection tool:[46] Irish warriors are thrown into the *peir dadeni*, the 'cauldron of rebirth', and then revived the next day (but they are dumb). Efnisien, Brân's half-brother, realises something needs doing to prevent complete calamity, and he gets himself thrown in (alive), then shatters the cauldron by forcing it from within but dies in the process. The cauldron – and the tale in general – is not about poetic inspiration but illustrates a series of motifs that elsewhere are appropriated to present ideas about poetry.

Llywarch's allusive lines imply a well-established identification of the cauldron as a source not just of nourishment or rebirth but specifically of inspiration. This is a symbolism which is found quite explicitly in Irish texts.[47] *The Cauldron of Poesy*, dating probably from the earlier eighth century, presents a complex symbolism in which three cauldrons represent different types of learning and inspiration; the text is philosophical rather than mythological, and knowledge and inspiration are pre-

c. 1050 and *c.* 1250, though in what form cannot of course be determined (Koch 2006, s.v. *Mabinogi*).

44 The strong Irish element in the narrative is an acknowledgement of the Irish influence on the tale: the cauldron comes from Ireland as a mythological tradition, as well as fictionally within the tale – though the cauldron was surely a pan-Celtic (and wider) phenomenon. See Mac Cana 1958 for discussion of the Irish background to *Branwen*; the cauldron is dealt with on pp. 46–64.

45 On Brân's head, see the brief account in Koch 2006, s.v. *Brân fab Llŷr*, §3; also Ross 1959 for a survey of carved heads from Britain and Ireland, along with summaries of tales of heads in Welsh and Irish sources.

46 Mac Cana (1958, pp. 50–60) raises the important issue that a specific analogue to the cauldron of resurrection is not found in old Irish sources, but regards the motif as most probably an authorial development based on well-recorded cauldrons of plenty, combined with resurrections of warriors taking place in other settings such as wells or ditches (notably the revival of the slain of the Túatha Dé Danann, who were cast into a well called 'Health', over which spells were cast, and emerged hale in the *Cath Maige Tuired*, which Mac Cana [1958, p. 54, n. 2] regards as the work of an eleventh- or twelfth-century redactor using older materials), possibly with further influence from folktales of cauldrons of healing recorded widely in Ireland later.

47 It need hardly be stated that a considerable number of motifs can be paralleled between the various Celtic traditions, and the assumption of some sort of shared Celtic tradition is commonplace. Yet the notion of a 'Celtic' tradition is in itself, of course, a modern construct. Sims-Williams (2011) demonstrates that Irish literature has left a far smaller footprint on medieval Welsh than might be assumed; there may have been a stronger connection earlier, as a result of shared heritage or of contact, for example through the many Irish forages into Britain in the preliterary period, but the whole issue of what exactly the supposed 'shared' Celtic tradition consists of is bound to remain a matter of contention. For present purposes, I follow the mainstream approach of assuming the legitimacy of such a notion. For further discussion, see Maier 2003 and Maier 2012, pp. 1–36.

sented as internal abstract qualities, but it uses imagery clearly deriving from earlier mythic associations of the cauldron (see Breatnach [ed.] 1981 for text and discussion).

6.4 Preideu Annwfyn

The cauldron also figures prominently in another Welsh text which, like *Branwen, Daughter of Llŷr*, deals with an Otherworld raid: *Preideu Annwfyn* ('The Spoils of the Otherworld') in the Book of Taliesin. The poem almost certainly has a strong Irish input:[48] not only is the castle, Kaer Sidi, named after the Irish *síd* or fairy-mound, but the raid itself is a familiar feature of Irish tradition. In particular, the *Aided Conroí maic Dáiri* ('The Tragic Death of Cú Roí mac Dáiri') combines the traditional cattle raid with a raid for a cauldron (along with a woman) and indeed identifies the cauldron as a calf of the raided cattle – the *preiddeu*, the object of the Welsh raid, may mean both "treasures" and "herds" (Haycock 2015, p. 440). The Irish text quotes from the poem *Síaburcharpat Con Culainn* ('The Phantom Chariot of Cú Chulainn'),[49] which deals with the visit of Cú Chulainn to the shadowy Otherworld:[50]

Boí coire isin dún. lóeg na teora mbó
tricha aige ina cróes. níbo luchtlach dó.
Tathigtis in coire sin. ba meldach in bág
ní·téigtis úad aitherruch. co-fargbatis lán.
Boí mór n-óir [is] n-arcait and. robo maith in fríth
do·biurt sa in coire sin. la ingin ind ríg.

(There was a cauldron in the fort:
The calf of the three cows,
Thirty cows within its gullet,

48 Higley (1996, pp. 43–44, with references cited there) points out wider Old Irish parallels to the narrative. She notes that the *Aided* refers also to the poem *Dún Scáith* in *Lebor na hUidre* where there is a sea voyage and a raid upon a stronghold with iron doors and a subterranean chamber, magic cattle, and a cauldron filled with drink.

49 The *Aided* is found in various manuscripts, including the Yellow Book of Lecan (Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1318) from the late fourteenth century, and goes back to a much earlier original (Thurneysen [1921, p. 435] dates the oldest version of the saga to the eighth century). Various dates have been suggested for the *Síaburcharpat Con Culainn*; Ó Béarra (2009, p. 81) concludes that a date of around 900 is likely. The text is cited from the edition of Thurneysen (1913, p. 191), who uses the late-sixteenth-century manuscript, London, British Library, Egerton 88. The edition of the poem by Meyer (1909–1910, p. 55) gives the text in the following form: *Búi caire isinn dun, laogh na teora mbo,/ tricha aighi ina craos ni ba luchtlach do./ Taithighdis in coire-sin, ba mellach in bagh,/ ni theghtis uadh for nach leth co bfagbadis lan./ Bui mor n-o[i]r is argait ant, ba hamra in frith,/ tobiur-sa an caire-sin la hingin in righ.* The translation is from Cross and Slover (1936), cited online at: http://homepage.eircom.net/~seabhacaille/Craobh_Crua/uc0017.html.

50 On this poem and related early Irish visits to the shadowy Otherworld (Tír scáith), see Ó Béarra 2009.

That was its portion.
They used to go to that cauldron,
Delightful was the struggle,
Nor did they come away from it again
Until they left it full.
There was much gold and silver in it,
It was a goodly find.
I carried off that cauldron
With the daughter of the king.)

Whatever its background, *Preideu Annwfyn* extends the thematic compass beyond anything the Irish texts or indeed *Branwen, Daughter of Llŷr* are concerned with in making explicit the motif of poetic inspiration. Its date of composition is unclear but probably lies between the ninth and twelfth centuries (Haycock 1983, p. 57). Influence from learned and Christian sources is evident, and monks are set up as an opposing intellectual force against 'native' or secular lore, though this can scarcely have been anything other than a fiction; the setting is the legendary past, when it may have been imagined that such a rift existed. The persona speaking the poem was probably imagined to be Taliesin. *Preideu Annwfyn* acts as a platform for Taliesin to display his familiarity with a range of poetic heroes and stories and to allude to narratives derived ultimately from written sources (Haycock 2015, pp. 433–434). Haycock outlines the likely background to its composition (1983, pp. 57–58):

> The skilful composition, coupled with the fact that it has been preserved at all, implies that we might well be dealing with the trained court poets who are in this instance wearing a different hat. In other words, court poets might have composed poems such as "Preiddeu Annwn" with an eye to providing entertainment of a fairly sophisticated kind; they chose to do so by setting aside their ceremonial *gravitas* and assuming the persona of a poet who was regarded by them as one of their founding fathers. By stressing the omniscience of the Taliesin figure, his familiarity with mythology and legend, his Otherworld connections, his mastery of exotic learning, they would, in a way, be swelling their own prestige and emphasizing the archaic origins of their poetic order. This would indirectly increase their standing and even enhance their authority in the society. From the point of view of the court poets, it would not be politic for the Taliesin persona to be seen purely as a worn-out old druid, desperately making a last stand for paganism; it was imperative that the concept of Taliesin moved along in Christian terms too, absorbing the latest elements of learning as well as retaining the key to the mysteries of the *cynfyd* [primordial world].

Preideu Annwfyn presents a raid on an otherworldly castle, named initially as Kaer Sidi and then given a further set of epithets at each turn of the narrative. What the raid achieves is not clearly stated, but the fort holds a prisoner, Gweir, and also a cauldron which 'does not boil a coward's food' (line 17: *Ny beirw bwyt llwfyr*), and it proved perilous, as scarcely any of the warriors survived. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*, Taliesin describes (lines 731–940) how after the battle of Camlan he accompanied the wounded King Arthur to the 'isle of apples', the Insula Pomorum, staffed by nine sisters: Taliesin is presented as a figure endowed with deep knowledge, consistent with someone who engages in Otherworld visits, and this concept most probably

underlies the narrative of *Preideu Annwfyn*, with its cauldron 'kindled by the breath of nine maidens' (line 14: *o anadyl naw morwyn gochyneuit* – which may, however, relate to the narrator's utterance rather than the cauldron itself), if, as Haycock convincingly argues, the persona of the poet here is the traditional Taliesin (Haycock 1983, p. 54).

Geoffrey's narrative is, of course, primarily about the translation of a warrior king to the Otherworld and Taliesin is an incidental figure, without much parallel in other Irish or Arthurian texts presenting this motif; yet his appearance is surely a reflection of the particular tradition also underlying the *Preideu Annwfyn*, wherein, as argued below, p. 508, a synthesis between warrior and poet occurs, the one acting as a metaphor for the other. How much wider this particular tradition was is difficult to say. The Insula Pomorum recalls the island off the coast of Armorica described by Pomponius Mela, writing around AD 43, where nine seeresses have skills of healing and prophecy, focused on those who sail out to visit them:[51]

> Sena in Britannico mari Ossismicis adversa litoribus, Gallici numinis oraculo insignis est, cuius antistites perpetua virginitate sanctae numero novem esse traduntur: Gallizenas vocant, putantque ingeniis singularibus praeditas maria ac ventos concitare carminibus, seque in quae velint animalia vertere, sanare quae apud alios insanabilia sunt, scire ventura et praedicare, sed nonnisi deditas navigantibus, et in id tantum ut se consulerent profectis.
>
> (The Île de Sein in the Channel, opposite the shores of the Ossismi, is famous for its oracle of a Gallic deity, whose priestesses, sanctified by perpetual virginity, are said to number nine: they are called Gallizenae [or, "these the Gauls call genae, 'maidens'"], and are thought to be endowed with the singular capacity to stir up seas and winds with spells, to turn themselves into whatever animals they like, to heal whatever among other people would be incurable, and to know the future and to predict it, but only when they have turned to their skills on behalf of those sailing, and then just so that they could advise those who had set out.)

It is possible, indeed likely, that Geoffrey has based his depiction of the Insula Pomorum and Arthur's care there on Pomponius Mela.[52] Be that as it may, Pomponius

51 Pomponius Mela: *De chorographia* III.48.

52 Egeler (2015, pp. 425–432) considers the accounts of Pomponius and Geoffrey in detail. He argues against earlier views of Pomponius's account as a classical literary fabrication (while accepting there may have been some influence from classical literature on the depiction). I would therefore emphasise that, insofar as Pomponius may be seen to be relaying genuine Celtic folk belief, he acts as an early witness to certain motifs found in some of the sources under consideration here. Egeler also, however, argues strongly in favour of Geoffrey's account being very largely derived from Pomponius. I would differ slightly in general approach from Egeler, who over all takes the line that demonstration of a likely classical (or non-native) origin for a motif excludes the possibility of it being native. Of course, elements which are not exclusive to one tradition or another cannot prove native continuity, but neither do they disprove it. Hence, I would be inclined to accept more scope for seeing Geoffrey's account as an amalgam derived from Pomponius but also from other Welsh traditions. The ninefoldness of the female guardians of the Otherworld island might be mentioned as a case in point: Egeler sees this as a reflection of the nine women of Sena, but does not, for example, mention the nine women who bring about inspiration in the *Preideu Annwfyn*, which could, in principle, act as a bridge

is an independent, and very early, witness to the notion of an island endowed with otherworldly characteristics, including special healing and prophecy;[53] the healing and implicit resurrection of Arthur builds on a well-established tradition.[54] In certain respects the healing and prophetic Otherworld island acts as a parallel to the object of the raid of *Preideu Annwfyn*, an island fortress with a magical cauldron, whose purpose is not fully clear, but which, like Ceridwen's, nourishes poetry, and the seizure of which apparently goes hand in hand with the release of Gweir; hence it has salvific associations. As the island is a deathly place, removal from it is a symbolic rebirth, so there is some association in terms of imagery with the cauldron of rebirth, the *peir dadeni*, of *Branwen*. The cauldron and the Otherworld are thus interrelated motifs, seen variously as sources of healing and resurrection (for the wounded Arthur) and of knowledge (the seeresses): such interlinked symbolism is surely a long-standing traditional feature, whatever the particular paths it has followed to arrive in our extant sources. The concatenation of motifs that builds up within such a tradition does not, of course,

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in tradition between Pomponius and Geoffrey (though of course the difference in function entails various problems). Whilst Egeler here sees the ninefoldness as a specific feature, elsewhere (p. 189) he dismisses it as too vague a concept to constitute an argument that Geoffrey is inspired by the nine Muses. I would suggest that an approach which corresponds more closely to how writers' inspiration is actually likely to have worked – but one which is necessarily impossible to prove because of its inherent lack of specificity in most cases – is one that acknowledges the fact that writers used both traditional and learned elements to adapt their tales to fit the particular message they aspired to communicate within the cultural context in which they worked. Hence, it would seem equally possible that Pomponius may have been thinking of the Muses (though the connection is rather weak), or that the ninefoldness of the women is a readily invented 'super-trinity', based on ideas manifest elsewhere, for example in the threefold *matronae*; the *Preideu Annyfyn*'s nine women inspiring poetry would seem quite possibly to reflect ideas about the Muses, but at the same time it could be using this 'foreign' idea to reformulate already known images of ninefold healer seeresses, such as Pomponius witnesses to, as specifically poetic guardians. Geoffrey, in turn, even if he is deriving his account more or less entirely from Pomponius, could nonetheless be reiterating, and again reimagining, an existing image such as was found in the *Preideu Annwyfyn*. Tradition is always something that is negotiated and is affected at each retelling through the importation of new ideas, created by an author or brought from elsewhere, but by definition ceases to be tradition if it is wholly invented. It would seem inherently more likely that a writer purporting to relay native traditions would actually be doing so to some degree, rather than simply inventing (or importing) everything, but the question of how far Geoffrey is actually a 'traditionalist' in this sense cannot be entered into here. Egeler's work (2015) forms a substantial and involved consideration of the Otherworld island in Celtic tradition, along with comparisons with Germanic traditions, where the sources are presented and discussed in meticulous and critical detail.

53 A number of classical sources, including Procopius, Plutarch and Pliny as well as Pomponius Mela, mention otherworldly islands within the Celtic area, with various characteristics, such that, according to the conclusion of Egeler (2015, p. 439), any coherent picture of a 'Celtic' Otherworld cannot be built up, but which demonstrate that the supposedly pagan motifs of Irish (and presumably Welsh) literature actually have roots in the imagination of pre-Christian times.

54 See Egeler (2015, pp. 451–455) on insular Celtic parallels to the removal of the wounded king by healing women to an Otherworld setting.

predetermine the way different poets realise the implicit symbolic connection between the motifs: thus, the presence of Taliesin on Arthur's voyage to the Otherworld as recounted by Geoffrey is fairly incidental, and at most we could say that the poet had to be there in order to bring the news back and relate it in poetry to be handed on. In the case of *Preideu Annwfyn* – if the reading adopted here is correct – a more sophisticated system of symbols and metaphors is built up on the basis of this tradition.

Such a reading derives from one of the most perceptive and far-reaching analyses of *Preideu Annwfyn*, that of Higley (1996). Whilst Haycock, as noted, pointed out that the poem acts as a platform for displaying the repertoire and skill of the archetypal poet Taliesin, and hence of court poets in general, Higley argues that the raid is about poetry itself. Despite the poem's obscurity, she views it as "compellingly coherent within the context of a prevalent Indo-European metaphor – wisdom as something material; wisdom as plunder" (1996, p. 49). She argues (pp. 45–46):

> I submit that "Preideu Annwn" is a kind of meta-text, a poem about the arcane materials of poetry. Its power lies in its studious avoidance of "all connexion with thought" – perhaps the thought connected to reading. Indeed, the text repeatedly points to this asset in its scornful insistence on the ignorance of the monks, the slack shield straps of the "little men of letters", even its refusal to designate the fortress by a single name. It is built on a foundation of shifting words – whether through intention or transmission – which thwarts our efforts to get a "word for word" translation. [...] it is possible that the text deliberately depicts the poet's seizure of poetic knowledge – from a place containing the cauldron of inspiration – through an adventure which has literally yielded him the Spoils of the Otherworld.

In line 13 the poet proclaims *Yg kynneir, o'r peir pan leferit*, translated by Haycock as "My first utterance was spoken concerning the cauldron", but Haycock notes (2015, p. 443) that *kynneir* is "first utterance, song" and *o* [...] *pan* may be 'from' rather than 'concerning'; Higley (1996, p. 50) accordingly translates "My poetry, from the cauldron it was uttered". Given the poem's protean proclivities, a play on both meanings seems highly likely: the first thing the poet sings is the cauldron, and it was from the cauldron that his inspiration to sing of it sprang. Just before this, we have been presented with the prisoner, Gweir, of whom it is stated *A rac preideu Annwfyn tost yt geni*, rendered by Higley "And before (?for) the spoils of Annwfyn bitterly he sang". Higley (1996, p. 49) identifies the prisoner Gweir with the poet, and following her line of argument, we may see the spoils he sings before or for as poetry itself (represented in concrete form by the cauldron), wrested from Annwfyn through hardship. As Higley notes (1996, p. 48), there is a pervading trope of comparison of men who seek knowledge to heroes of old who sought booty: hence the heroic raid is a metaphor for raiding the Otherworld for poetic inspiration, and the symbolic meaning of the statement that the cauldron does not produce food for cowards is that it produces fit nourishment for poets. The spoils, then, are the cauldron of poesy, but the objective is to free Gweir. Gweir, the poet, is the embodiment of what the cauldron affords, and in narrative terms is structurally equivalent: the salvation of a poet from an Otherworld prison is

also the salvation of poetry thence. This quest is fittingly undertaken (so it has been argued) by Taliesin, a persona who embodies bardic tradition: hence poetic tradition saves poetry, by raiding the Otherworld and telling of the exploit. The military imagery stresses the difficulty of poetry: both for the poet to compose and – as reflected in the poem's obscurity – for the listener to understand.

Another pervasive imagery identified by Higley is that of confinement. Gweir as a prisoner follows suit with a number of poets: in the *Ystoria Taliesin* the poet boasts that he has been three times in the prison of Arianrhod (Ford [transl.] 2008, p. 172) and in stocks and fetters for a day and a year in the court of Cynfelyn (Ford 2008, p. 173); in the *Canu Aneirin*, st. 48, the speaker, 'I, not I, Aneirin' describes his incarceration in an underground dwelling (Ford 1987, p. 47):

ystynnawc vyg glin	My knees stretched out
en ty deyeryn.	in an earthen cell.
cadwyn heyernin	an iron chain
am ben vyn deulin	around my knees
o ved o vuelin.	about mead from horns
o gatraeth werin.	about Catraeth's host
mi na vi aneirin.	I – yet not I – Aneirin –
ys gwyr talyessin	Taliesin knows it
ovec kywrenhin.	(of the skilful speech)
neu cheing e ododin	[I] sang Gododdin
kynn gwawr dyd dilin.	before dawn the following day.[55]

This may, as Ford argued, relate to a form of bardic initiation involving ritual confinement or 'death'. We may also note the practice recorded in the eighteenth century in the Gaelic bardic schools, where initiates were confined in a dark room all day with a large stone on their belly (as if in the grave?) until they composed a verse, which was then to be presented as the lights were brought in (Ford 1987, p. 47; cf. also Ford 1992, p. 16). One account, cited by Ford from Martin's *Description of the Western Islands of Scotland* (1703), reads:

> I must not omit to relate their way of Study, which is very singular. They shut their Doors and Windows for a Days time, and lie on their backs with a Stone upon their Belly and Plads about their Heads, and their eyse being cover'd they pump their Brains for Rhetorical Encomium or Panegyrick; and indeed they furnish such a Stile from this Dark Cell as is understood by very few.

The theme can in fact be traced more widely: we might mention the *Etmic Dinbych*, where the poet is confined, but happily so, in a small room in the fortress of Tenby. Here, the confinement appears to act as a means of escaping limitation, in terms of

55 The text and translation are taken by Ford from the edition of *Canu Aneirin* by Ifor Williams, the translation being based on Williams's notes.

offering the poet the opportunity to range over the world (or whatever part of it he chooses) in his verse. The topic receives developed attention too in Irish traditions relating to the poet and wild man or *geilt*, Suibne. Nagy (1996, p. 29) notes that the *geilt* cannot find safe berth anywhere, even in the custody of a saint (where, indeed, Suibne is killed) – yet there is one space where Suibne thrives, "in which false perceptions, attempts at manipulation, and the malevolent dialogues of others cannot harm him", a space which Nagy identifies with that described in a ninth-century poem ascribed to Suibne, "my little oratory in Tuaim Inbir". Nagy concludes his discussion of the probably twelfth-century *Buile Shuibhne* by relating Suibne's experience to the content of this poem (1996, p. 30); his comments bear upon *Etmic Dinbych* and, more importantly, *Preideu Annwfyn* as well:

> This site of meditation, impervious to the elements and to human violence, a place of enclosure and security where, however, there is no fence and only God's sky for a ceiling – the creation of a legendary craftsman, a replica of the natural world with its own sun, stars, and moon, wherein God can be addressed in terms of the utmost intimacy: is this not the poem itself, or more specifically the textual, written form of the poem that we share with its author, and even with the author of us all, "so that its story may be told to you"? This is indeed a space in which to feel paradoxically free despite if not through its restrictions, in which engaged poet and equally engaged reader can obliterate the distinction between dialogue and monologue, and in which even a *geilt* – or, perhaps, especially a *geilt* – can obtain respect and everlasting fame.

Preideu Annwfyn progresses from the confinement of the bard Gweir through ever-expanding spaces, represented in the successive names of the fortress, Kaer Sidi ('castle of the *áes síde*', the mound-dwelling divinities of Irish tradition, whence the term is borrowed), Kaer Vedwit ('castle of mead-drunkenness'), Kaer Rigor, 'the castle of glass', and so on, through a series of incomprehensible terms which are associated with an increasingly cosmic focus of poetic presentation, with how the wind and sea and fire work (lines 50–51), and the division between light and darkness (line 55), concluding with the gift of Christ himself to the poet.[56] This gift is surely the inspired knowledge of the cosmos, expressed through poetry, that the poet has just demonstrated: hence Christ's gift is the acquisition of the selfsame poetic 'spoils of Annwfyn' which the poem has been narrating from the outset.

Higley's reading of the poem is further refined by Adderley (2009), whose interpretation roots the message of the poem in the cultural circumstances of the time

56 If, as Haycock argues, the poet is Taliesin (even if he is also Gweir), then one of the best-known of Taliesin's characteristics, his transmogrification into multiple forms (as for example in the *Kat Godeu*, where he is tiny and huge, the smallest spark in the fire and a great flaming log, a foam on the wave, a droplet in the air, a raindrop in the shower, and so forth), is ostensibly absent from *Preideu Annwfyn*. However, surely the transformations are here displaced onto the world the poet traverses, represented in the ever-changing names, and hence character, of the castle. Haycock notes (2015, p. 167) that the transformations of the poet embody the very metaphors of poetry itself, and the same may be said of the transformation of the poetic landscape in the guise of the ever-shifting castle.

of its likely composition. He argues that Taliesin, the persona of the poem, stands as advocate for the traditional oral bardic craft, as opposed to monks, whose learning added up to little: it adopts a particular cultural stance in defence of the value of traditional bardic excellence. He notes (2009, p. 190) that towards its conclusion, the poem, in decrying the shortcomings of monks, "in this passage has become a poem about its own reception, or about the reception of poems like itself. The monks are unable to comprehend the traditional context upon which an oral poet depends for effective communication. In other words, the poem is not merely a specimen of oral poetry, but it begins to look as if the poem is at least partially about orality, as opposed to literacy, as a means of imaginative communication." The raid on Annwfyn provided the fodder for this poetic imagination to display itself, much as for Finnish oral poets the otherworldly Sampo 'did not lack words', providing an inexhaustible store of inspiration for poets to display their craft.

We may conclude this short discussion of the complex *Preideu Annwfyn* by considering the meaning of Annwfyn. Haycock (2015, p. 440, where a number of analogous uses are discussed) notes that it may be interpreted as either "very deep" or "not world" – again, it would seem possible that both interpretations may have been apparent to, and exploited by, the poet. "Very deep" implies an underworld, but it also emphasises inaccessibility, and in general the otherworldly setting of the raid. "Not world", the world that does not exist, is perhaps more interesting: the inference we are to draw is that poetry is wrested out of non-existence by the poet. The poet thus acts as a sort of creator *ex nihilo*, and the release of Gweir from confinement is a metaphor for the emergence of the poetic gift, in the hands of the poet, from inaccessible non-existence. The initial confinement of Kaer Sidi, the realm of evanescent Otherworld beings (the *aes side* of Irish tradition), is contrasted with the concluding wide cosmic landscape whose master is Christ, the source of all being, who rewards the poet with, we are to understand, the gift of poetic creativity.

Yet behind this Christian conceptual framework may have lain a more ancient understanding, if we give any credence to Giraldus's account. The 'shamanic' nature of the latter has been noted, in that it would seem to indicate a trance contact with the Otherworld, whence the prophetic statements of the *awenyddion* are drawn.[57] From the shaman's perspective, what he experiences is an actual journey, which he then describes; likewise, the aretalogical lists of Taliesin's transformations are presented as authoritative statements of what he actually experienced, which – if we invoke Giraldus's account – were perhaps imagined from the outside as taking place in trance.[58] Within the primarily oral culture which produced Taliesin's verse

57 I would emphasise here the fallacy of inferring from this that the ancient Celts were practisers of 'shamanism' in anything resembling the complex forms found in Siberia or elsewhere, for which much further evidence would be needed.

58 The problem here, however, is that Giraldus indicates the *awenyddion* did not remember what they had spoken in trance, which means the first-person aretalogies could not be the conscious relaying

(subsequently committed to writing in the Book of Taliesin), as in oral shamanic societies, the statements of the poet-seer surely served the function of asserting the validity of tradition, lending it authority as something actually experienced by the select few.

The purpose of the trance journey, in classic Siberian shamanism, is often to free the soul of someone held captive in the unworld of the dead (which equates to some dire illness in the patient in our world) or, as seen in the Finnish examples, to secure some specialist knowledge. *Preideu Annwfyn* arguably presents both of these: the freeing of the captive Gweir and the securing of the skill to perform poetry, of which Gweir may indeed be the bearer. In both Finnish and Welsh tradition, then, there are indications that the poet, as a quasi-shaman, may have been understood to visit the Otherworld in trance, making real the irrealities of this unworld through poetic composition.

6.5 The female guardian of poetic inspiration

Other than in its allusion to the nine maidens whose breath lights the cauldron or enlightens the poet, *Preideu Annwfyn* does not exhibit the theme of the female guardian of prophetic knowledge, named as Ceridfen in Llywarch ap Llywelyn's verse cited above, though it is a widespread motif, no doubt of great antiquity. Within various Celtic traditions, the female prophetess occurs in ancient Gaulish materials and is found for example in the Irish Ulster cycles, with prophecies being offered by females like Fedelm, the amazon druidess Scáthach or the war goddess Morrígan (Koch 2006, s.v. "Prophecy", §2).

Haycock (2015, pp. 13–14) traces references to Ceridfen. Around 1100–1130, a poet in Cemais, north Pembrokeshire, requested from God 'the dignity of Ceridfen's song'; in the 1160s Cynddelw knew 'the ways of Ceridfen's arts' and referred to Taliesin; Ceridfen's cauldron finds its first dated occurrence in a poem by Llywarch ap Llywelyn (Prydydd y Moch), from around 1217, who asks God for 'the words of Ceridfen', and inspiration from God 'as from Ceridfen's cauldron', and also gives the first datable reference to Taliesin releasing his patron, Elphin. However, Haycock notes (2015, pp. 313–314) that by the later fourteenth century, Ceridfen seems to have become a figure of fun, judging by Iolo Goch's satirical elegy to Hersdin Hogl, a stock female character who consorted with devils, carrying a great tub and flail that made her look like an old witch living in the days of Ceridfen; also notable is that no other mainstream poets of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries mention Ceridfen by name, though several

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of the poet's experience in the Otherworld. Taliesin's boastful supremacy over other bards indicates a mastery of expressing the Otherworld in this world, so it is unlikely these aretalogies were imagined as taking place unconsciously. Giraldus's account is, however, somewhat suspect: it may indicate that poets were thought to have trance contact with the Otherworld, but the degree of loss of consciousness may be an exaggeration on Giraldus's part.

mention the *peir awen* ('cauldron of poetic inspiration'). While Taliesin continued to accrue prestige as an icon for poets, it seems they were reluctant to link themselves with hocus-pocus by associating their idol with Ceridfen or with female control over *awen*, preferring to assert that Taliesin's inspiration was linked with learning and wisdom.

6.6 The *Ystoria Taliesin*

The cauldron, its female guardian Ceridwen (Ceridfen) and *awen* come together in 'The Tale of Gwion Bach', the first part of the *Ystoria Taliesin*, which relates how Taliesin acquired the gift of poetry and went on to become a great poet. The tale may be summarised thus: Ceridwen is presented as a witch, gathering herbs to make a potion in her cauldron which, after brewing for a year, is to produce three drops of wisdom-bestowing liquor, which she intends for her ugly monster of a son, Morfran ('Great crow'), otherwise known as Y Fagddu or Afagddu ('Utter darkness'). She employs an old blind man to tend the fire, assisted by the young lad Gwion Bach. At the due time, she sets her son beside the cauldron, and goes to rest, but Gwion shoves him out of the way,[59] and the three drops shoot from the cauldron onto him; the cauldron then shatters from all the poison left in it. He is filled with wisdom and realises that Ceridwen will destroy him, so he flees, turning into various animals, with her in pursuit, also transmogrified into birds or beasts of prey, until he turns into a grain, and she into a hen: she swallows him, and becomes pregnant, giving birth to a son so fair she could not destroy him, but instead abandons him in a basket or coracle on a river, lake or sea. He is later found and becomes the great poet Taliesin.

Given the close association here between Ceridwen and Taliesin and the mirroring of what is implicit in the references to poetic inspiration by poets of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as well as motifs such as the transmogrifications of the poet found also in texts such as *Kat Godeu* and *Angar Kyfundawt*, a date for the tale somewhere in the High Middle Ages might be anticipated. In fact, no version earlier than the mid-sixteenth century exists: the earliest version was written by Elis Gruffydd and included in his chronicle of the world, but a variant version of the 'Tale of Gwion' section (the rest being abbreviated) was made around the same time by Roger Morris.[60] The text therefore postdates the demise, just noted above, of the esteem felt towards Ceridfen.

59 In the Morris recension, Ceridwen is gathering herbs when the cauldron spurts out the elixir drops, and Gwion is spattered with them by chance, rather than shoving Morfran out of the way.

60 See Ford (1992) for edition (with detailed introduction) of both redactions, and Ford (2008, pp. 159–181) for translation of the Gruffydd text, and Guest (1892, pp. 117–120) for the Morris redaction (though taken from a later, eighteenth-century, manuscript). Valuable, indeed indispensable, as it is, Ford's edition of the *Ystoria Taliesin* has failings. It tends to lack rigour in its critique of earlier

Two approaches are possible. The more romantic notion, held by earlier scholars such as Williams, is that the *Ystoria*, or something very like it, must have existed at a much earlier date to explain the allusive references in poems such as those of the Book of Taliesin to motifs which are explained fully only in the *Ystoria*.[61]

The other option is that the *Ystoria* is essentially an antiquarian work constructed on the basis of earlier, allusively expressed (and possibly misunderstood) traditions such as are preserved in the earlier poems. The account would then be deliberately archaising, for example in ignoring the ignominy into which Ceridfen appears to have fallen in the intervening centuries, and in eschewing the religious connotations that

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scholarship – it is scarcely satisfactory to simply state (p. 10) "contemporary scholarship has followed Sir Ifor's lead", for example. It fails to make clear exactly what form any supposed antecedent of the extant *Ystoria* might have taken, or to give any analysis, or explanation, of the differences between the two earliest, sixteenth-century texts of the *Ystoria*. The discussion of linguistic features is in one sense precise, but it is not used to construct any arguments about the history of the text: how far, for example, do the earlier linguistic forms indicate use of earlier sources as opposed to mere antiquarianism, and does the anglicising tendency Ford notes (1992, p. vi) as characteristic of Gruffydd show itself more or less strongly in the *Ystoria* than elsewhere in his work? For those not given to romantic notions about medieval or Renaissance texts, Ford's edition regrettably leaves many questions unanswered. Haycock is, thankfully, more critical in her magisterial edition of the Book of Taliesin, including her short discussion therein of the *Ystoria Taliesin*.

61 Ford observes (2008, p. 159): "There can be little doubt that the tale of Taliesin is very old, and yet none of it turns up in any Welsh manuscript before the sixteenth century." The latter, factual part of this observation surely gives no grounds for the inference opined in the former part, for which no further evidence is cited – though what Ford actually means is difficult to determine, as he never defines, either in the introduction to his translation or in his edition, what he means by the "tale of Taliesin". Certain elements can be shown to be much older, but Ford seems to imply something much closer to the extant form of the *Ystoria*. Ford correctly notes (1992, p. 38) that tradition only preserves what is relevant to the culture, but the inference he appears to draw, that the culture must therefore have found ancient tales relevant, is scarcely what a folklorist would conclude: rather, the tradition, or narrative, which is preserved is to be seen as the outcome of a negotiation between tradition and *actualité*, a negotiation which always results in adaptation and (re)invention. Ford furthermore attempts (1992, pp. 38–46) to demonstrate the antiquity of the "tale" (whatever that means) through extensive citations of references to it, but these show no more than that some sort of narrative of Taliesin was well known, but the references are in any case to works postdating the *Ystoria Taliesin*, which could hence itself be responsible for establishing a good deal of the popularity of the "tradition" of Taliesin (though obviously not all of it, given the earlier poetic allusions, discussed above). Similarly problematic, as Ford notes (1992, p. 46), is Gruffydd's assertion that the tale was widespread among the "folk". In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and to a degree also in earlier centuries, lore was increasingly antiquarian and beholden to written sources. Folk tradition itself was also clearly open to such literary influence; it is a mistaken Romantic notion to separate the 'folk' off from the rest of society, as if they were a separate species. Even by Gruffydd's time, poets, who held the bard Taliesin as their icon and were the chief promulgators of traditions about him, had long been literate. 'Folk' culture was thus something carefully nurtured by a literate elite. (Unfortunately, instead of pursuing the relationship between literary and folk traditions, Ford launches into a rather irrelevant diatribe against the folklore research of Wood, such as Wood 1982, at this point).

had accrued around *awen*.[62] This more sceptical approach is reflected, for example, in Haycock's remarks (2015, p. 19) that no developed form of the *Ystoria* need have existed earlier, at the time of the composition of the poems of the Book of Taliesin, but instead may itself be based on the poems. She notes that some motifs of the tale may indeed be misinterpretations of these poems; in particular Ceridwen's turning into a hen and her ingestion of the grain which turns into Taliesin may be an over-literal interpretation of the difficult riddling passage in *Angar Kyfundawt*, lines 249–252, where Taliesin is a grain that is brewed into a drink (Haycock 2015, pp. 108–109, 164–165). The form of the tale that we have should, then, be viewed as expressing the concerns of the sixteenth century through the use of archaic motifs; we have no grounds for assuming that any particular aspects of the way these motifs are presented or concatenated antedate the earliest manuscripts in which they are found, and the most immediate concern should be to investigate and explain the text as a piece of Renaissance Welsh literature, even if this involves delving into the origins of the motifs found within it and uncovering what may be fragments of an earlier heritage.

Gruffydd was a learned man, and well travelled (Ford [transl.] 2008, p. 160); we may suspect from the outset that he was not simply relating a traditional Welsh tale devoid of any input from his own experience. Ford notes, in fact (1992, p. vi): "It is clear that he attempted to use his sources critically, that he digested them and paraphrased them at times, often commenting editorially on the sources and adding further information from unnamed oral sources, hearsay, gossip, climate of opinion." Relevant here is an important study by Wood (1983), who notes how poets, including in particular Vergil but also Taliesin, were turned into magicians in medieval and Renaissance tradition, including in the *Ystoria Taliesin*.[63] Wood notes (1983, p. 99) the close connection between poetry and prophecy in Celtic understanding (to be a prophet required poetic skill) and shows how the role of magician was an extension to that of prophet. It is to be noted how Gruffydd distances himself from this story by adding comments about its unbelievability, which Ford took to be a sign that he was

62 These connotations are seen, for example, in the debate about poetry between Rhys Goch Eryry and Llywelyn ab y Moel in the early fifteenth century, where *awen* is seen as derived from God, an updating of an earlier, more secular tradition which associated it with Ceridfen (Ford 1992, pp. 33 ff.).
63 Wood notes (1983, p. 96): "In the orally collected birth tales, Vergil's mother becomes pregnant after drinking a golden cordial and her child is subsequently born with a gold star on his forehead. The same pattern appears in *Hanes Taliesin*, where Ceridwen becomes pregnant after eating a grain of wheat – in reality the transformed Gwion Bach. The name of her child, Taliesin, is taken to mean 'Fair Brow'." Astonishingly, Wood gives no reference for this potential Vergilian folklore background to the Taliesin story. Ford (1992, p. 47) objects to Wood's adducing of Vergilian parallels, noting that virtually every distinct feature of the *Ystoria Taliesin* has analogues within early Celtic traditional narratives. However, even if this is the case, it does not disprove an influence from the Vergilian tradition that was becoming so well known during the Renaissance – and all the more so given that the Morris recension of the *Ystoria* in fact mentions Vergil (a point not discussed by Ford).

relaying a much older tale from which he felt culturally detached. However, this may simply be a narrative device serving a quite different purpose. One of the strongest comments comes after relating the essential purpose of the procedure (Ford [transl.] 2008, p. 163):

> Furthermore, she would see that all the juice of those herbs except the three aforementioned drops would be as powerful a poison as there could be in the world, and that it would shatter the cauldron and spill the poison across the land. (Indeed, this tale is illogical and contrary to faith and piety.)

Surely, however, what we have here (and in the procedure in general) is an allusion to distillation (with the still exploding at the end!), which is far from being an illogical process in itself, though its presence in a supposedly early medieval myth might well be described as irrational, and which, combined as it was with alchemy and the search for the *quinta essentia*, could be viewed as impious; it is certainly in line with the aura of magic that Wood traces as characteristic of the inspired poet. Distillation, the art of garnering 'the drops that come down', became known in the sixteenth century from two influential works of Hieronymus Brunschwig, the *Liber de arte distillandi de simplicibus* (1500) and the *Liber de arte distillandi de compositis* (1512). Brunschwig was a doctor and an alchemist, and much in the books is concerned with herbal medicine (the *quinta essentia*, which formed the heavenly bodies, could, it was hoped, be distilled from herbs to form a wonderful medicine).

Gruffydd, then, appears to be following the cultural development whereby the inspired poet comes to be seen as a magician, but updates it in accordance with current scientific interests, building on the earlier notion that *awen* derives from the cauldron of Ceridwen (which is all that Llywarch ap Llywelyn, and other earlier poets, say)[64] and identifying Ceridwen as a sort of deranged herbal alchemist and *awen* as the *quinta essentia* she distils.[65] Yet, although this is innovatory, it also relates to an

64 A complex development of ideas is already apparent by the fourteenth century in the poem *Mydwyf Merweryd* in the Book of Taliesin. Here (lines 62–66), a five-beamed cauldron (*peir pumwyd*, perhaps a cauldron on its stand) is contrasted with the supreme tree (cross) of the Redeemer as the vessel in which he will boil some people up; hence we have an image of a hellish cauldron for the damned. Yet it is immediately followed – though with no explicit connection – by a mention of the 'river of Gwiawn' (*Gwiaun auon*), pleasing to princes, which is a periphrasis for poetry. There can be little doubt that these lines make a subtle allusion to the witch-cauldron (of Ceridwen) that nonetheless produced a 'river', an outflow, for Gwion, turning him into a poet. They also imply a rejection of the 'pagan' image of poetry originating with a witch, and contrast the devilish cauldron with the salvation of Christ's cross.

65 In a detailed but now dated study, Scott (1930, ch. IV) sought to trace the origin of the tale of Gwion to that of the Irish hero, Finn mac Cumaill. The argument relies on the Morris recension of the *Ystoria Taliesin*, in which Gwion accidentally gets the liquor on his finger, and, from the pain of the heat, licks it off: these details, which are central to the Finn stories, do not occur in the tale of Gwion in Gruffydd's recension, and it is difficult to determine which version is more archaic. It is perhaps possible

older association: Haycock (2015, p. 164) notes that several of the Book of Taliesin poems "indicate an interest in alcoholic drinks, the origins and nature of which were as mysterious as the *awen* from the cauldron".[66]

Ford (1992, p. 37) compares the *Ystoria Taliesin* to the Icelander Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*, which was written in the 1220s in order to set out in a clear form the stories that lay behind the complex periphrastic expressions of traditional Norse verse. The comparison is apt; the inference to draw, following our understanding of what Snorri was doing, is that while elements of the narrative are certainly ancient, the detailed continuous narration in itself is not, and it reflects contemporary (mis)understandings of earlier tradition. It would appear in the cases of both Welsh and Norse poetry that when the poetic tradition was at its height, it was not felt necessary to set out continuous narratives to explain how poetry worked or where it originated; the need for this sort of explication came to be felt at times of cultural change and threat to the old traditions (in this respect, we may also note how many of the great works of medieval Welsh literature such as the *Mabinogion* were put into writing at an earlier period of cultural stress, the loss of political independence and royal patronage).[67] The issuing of the *Ystoria Taliesin* corresponds approximately to that of some of the early Welsh grammars, such as that of Siôn Dafydd Rhys (Rhæsus 1592), which served the additional purpose of describing, and preserving, the mechanics of Welsh poetic composition; Rhys's work is also antiquarian, harking back to the poetic grammarians of the fourteenth century. The Tudor settlement forced Wales to become more cosmopolitan in outlook, and if its poetic traditions were to be preserved, they needed to be set down and explained in a contemporary form, less abstruse than the allusions

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that the Finn story has influenced that of Gwion, but it is not clear how or when this would have taken place; the influence of Irish tradition upon Welsh prior to this period was minimal: see Sims-Williams (2011), who (pp. 310 ff.) notes the use of the name Finn in a few instances by fourteenth-century poets, but also observes that there is little indication that any narrative elements were borrowed – though the apparent Irish background to *Branwen, Daughter of Llŷr*, for example, surely illustrates that such influence did exist in some cases. In general, Scott's study remains useful for the array of sources, and discussions of them, which he gives, but the approach to them is both over-complex and under-critical; there is scarcely any consideration of historical or performative context, and the treatment of what are often essentially folklore texts is based entirely on models of classical stemmata which are found inadequate or misplaced within folkloristic studies today; many of the best observations in the book in fact derive from C. W. von Sydow, the great Swedish folklorist who was ahead of his time.

66 Ironically, Haycock's comment relates to the very passage of the *Angar Kyfundawt* which the *Ystoria Taliesin* appears to have misunderstood: Haycock interprets the poem as describing brewing here, with the 'hen' being a metaphor for the drying kiln, but which was interpreted literally in the *Ystoria Taliesin* (the hen swallows the grain into which Taliesin has turned). On Haycock's interpretation, the link between the production of alcoholic drink and *awen* would be an ancient feature, but the failure to understand this, one of the main passages to hint at the linked imagery, indicates that the *Ystoria Taliesin* has (if my reading is correct) perceived the connection anew.

67 I thank Peredur Lynch for this observation on the recording of such works at this critical historical juncture.

of the medieval poems, and made more widely available. The *Ystoria Taliesin* surely forms part of this movement.

I would like to consider some aspects of the symbolism of the *Ystoria Taliesin* which are absent from other sources or less apparent therein. It is impossible to demonstrate how ancient these aspects of the work may be, but it would not be unreasonable to suppose that in some cases a poetic working of tradition has taken place antecedent to the *Ystoria Taliesin*.

Among the many analogues to the Taliesin legend adduced by Ford, the story of Senchán Torpéist is particularly suggestive (Ford 1992, p. 23). This is recorded in the possibly late-ninth-century *Sanas Cormaic*, s.v. "Prull". The chief poet of Ireland, Senchán, is making a trip to the Isle of Man when his company is approached by a repulsively scruffy individual, who to their dismay begs to accompany them. When they arrive, they are met by a female poet, the lost daughter of úa Dulsaine, who challenges them to complete some quatrains she utters. Only the scruffy youth is able to do this, on behalf (so he insists) of Senchán. Upon their return, he turns into a handsome fair-haired youth but then disappears after performing a ceremony upon Senchán (endowing him with poetic inspiration, we are to assume, following Ford's reading). The narrator comments that there can be no doubt that the youth was the *poematis spiritus* ('the spirit of poetry') or, to put it into Welsh, *awen*. He is described as *gile* ('most white') or radiant – a motif that is of great antiquity, found in varying forms in several Indo-European traditions (see below, pp. 525, 529, for discussion). Ford's reading is questioned by Ní Dhonnchadha (2004), who points out that Senchán – already renowned for his poetic skills – is not ostensibly "initiated" into poetry in the account. Rather, the focus is upon the contrast between the establishment poet, Senchán, who is struck dumb when challenged, and poetic inspiration coming from unlikely and peripheral sources, a scruffy youth and an exiled, impoverished female. Ní Dhonnchadha concludes (2004, p. 176) that the account "uses contemporary gendering to valorize inspiration at the expense of diligence, the amateur poet at the expense of the professional one, the point being that poetic 'genius' will find its level irrespective of schooling or sex, and it is there that *spiritus poematis* presides".

Another Irish analogue (Ford 1992, p. 21) presents the origin of the court poet of Conchobar, Amairgein (Book of Leinster, vol. II, pp. 434–439). He began as a grotesquely ugly son of a smith and was without speech up to the age of fourteen when he started uttering riddling poetic phrases. The poet Athirne 'kills' him, but it is merely an image which is assaulted, then fosters him to become the chief poet of Ulster after him. As Ford observes (1992, p. 25), the liminal character of the poet in society is expressed through a series of paradoxes: fair radiance emerges from repugnant ugliness; the master of the arcane and potent language of poetry is at first dumb. This transformation is represented as a physical change through a sort of rite of passage: the daughter of úa Dulsaine and the *poematis spiritus* are physically restituted, and Senchán undergoes a possibly transformative ceremony on the return

voyage (the sea marking the boundary with the Otherworld, a motif found widely in the Irish *immram* tradition: see Wooding 2000), and Amargein is symbolically resurrected.

Taliesin is the 'Radiant brow' and his antithesis in the *Ystoria Taliesin* is Morfran ('Great crow'), otherwise known as Afagddu (or Y Fagddu), apparently "Black beaver/water monster" but with the developed sense of "Utter darkness, hell" (Koch 2006, s.v. *Afanc*; Ford 1992, p. 89, however, suggests "dark-nurtured"). Both Morfran and Taliesin are born of Ceridwen: a structuralist approach allows us to view them as the same character, the dark transformed into the light, as in the Irish analogue of Senchán Torpéist. The narrative actually presents the lad Gwion as the one who is transformed into Taliesin; however, Ford notes (1992, p. 29) the derivation suggested by Hamp (1978), whereby *Gwion* is related to Irish *fí* ('poison'), with *-on* as a suffix typically indicating a connection with the divine.[68] This would make Gwion a personification of the poisonous content of the cauldron, which, however, 'gives birth' to the elixir drops of inspiration, a process which is realised in the transformation of Gwion into the poet Taliesin. Gwion would thus be the dark antecedent to the reborn and radiant poet and structurally parallel to Morfran/Afagddu. Afagddu, utter darkness, as the (intended) holder of poetry is parallel to the Annwfyn, the 'non-world', of *Preideu Annwfyn*, whence poetic inspiration is seized by the poet and brought into the light (that is, expressed in verse), just as Taliesin-to-be grabs the drops from the cauldron and from their intended owner.[69] Morfran ('Great crow') obviously also invokes images of ugly blackness, but the crow also relates to Brân ('Crow'), whose prophetic head figures as an Otherworld denizen in *Branwen, Daughter of Llŷr*: hence the name presages the prophetic powers that will come to Taliesin. A further structural parallel may be seen in the *Ystoria Taliesin* between Ceridwen and her cauldron: the drops of inspiration emerge – are, as it were, 'born' – from the cauldron after a period of 'gestation', carefully managed by Ceridwen but whose outcome she cannot herself oversee; her going to rest is surely her 'accouchement', concomitant with the cauldron's giving birth to poetic inspiration, when she has to hand matters over to the 'midwife' Morfran, like a mother in labour; it should be remembered, of course, that the primary image of the cauldron was one of 'rebirth', as seen clearly in *Branwen, Daughter of Llŷr*. Ceridwen's sleep at the moment of *awen*'s birth is itself a sort of

68 Haycock (2015, pp. 130–131) notes that Hamp's etymology ignores the more common orthographic form of the name, *Gwiawn*, which must then be explained as a bogus archaising form constructed on the ambiguous form *Gwion*, or in some other way.

69 Haycock argues (2015, p. 312) that in *Kadeir Kerrituen* in the Book of Taliesin, Afagddu may be the son of Taliesin rather than of Ceridwen: this depends on who the narrator of the poem is understood to be. Haycock tends to regard Taliesin as an all-present narrator persona throughout the collection, but this is not incontrovertible. Even if Afagddu is Taliesin's son here, it is possible that the tradition underlying the *Ystoria Taliesin* differed. In terms of the symbolism evident in the Irish analogues adduced by Ford, and supported here, the radiant poet has a dark origin; there would appear little sense in the poet's radiance turning into darkness in the form of his son.

death, a retraction into the darkness which gives rise to *awen*, and which was ritualised in the Gaelic dark room of the bards, with its grave symbolism. The 'death' which gives rise to *awen* is paralleled in the death, the shattering, of the cauldron as it produces the elixir. The birth of Taliesin, the embodiment of poetic craft, from Ceridwen is therefore a personified version of the birth of *awen* from the cauldron and from Annwfyn.

Read in this manner, the *Ystoria Taliesin* reveals an appropriation of traditional motifs to symbolise the gaining of poetic inspiration: thus in *Branwen, Daughter of Llŷr* the shattering of the cauldron and Brân (and his head) are not related to themes of poetic inspiration, but at some stage in the poetic tradition bards would appear to have exploited the potential of these symbols to focus on the nature of their craft.

The *Ystoria Taliesin* very much gives the impression of having amalgamated and made concrete a series of imageries understood in poetic tradition figuratively and presented allusively. It is probable, indeed certain, that we do not possess all the poems in which such imagery was originally used. The *Ystoria Taliesin* would then be more akin to Snorri's *Edda* than Ford allowed for: it was typical for Snorri to amalgamate allusive poetic sources and present coherent narratives of a form which were not found in earlier tradition (the mead of poetry being the classic case of this) and indeed were alien to it, in that poets generally worked allusively and imaginatively, rather than narratively, and did not seek to make their allusions consistent with allusions used elsewhere, as long as they were comprehensible within the general tradition. The double-naming of Ceridwen's son (Morfran and Afagddu), for example, recalls, methodologically speaking, Snorri's equating of the primordial giant Aurgelmir with Ymir (Snorri: *Gylfaginning*, ch. 5; cf. *Vafþrúðnismál*, st. 28–31, and *Grímnismál*, st. 40) when elsewhere these beings were separate, with a different type of creation myth attached to each. The narrative awkwardnesses such as Afagddu being a dead-end character may be explained as the results of attempting to form a coherent narrative out of originally deliberately fragmentary and allusive references to the origins of poetic inspiration:[70] the *modus operandi* of a work such as *Preideu Annwfyn* is quite different from that of *Ystoria Taliesin*. Attempts to square into cohesive narratives such circles of poetic imagery as are found in these early works in verse are bound to end in anomalies. Indeed, the inference to draw from the apparently deliberate obscurantism (as Higley in particular argues, 1993, especially ch. 7) of Welsh poetry that dealt with poetry, which is associated with the bard Taliesin (*Angar Kyfundawt*, *Kat Godeu*, *Preideu Annwfyn*), is that, just as Snorri's *Edda* – invaluable as it may be to us today for its repertoire of clearly narrated myth – is alien to the spirit of the earlier, allusive skaldic court poetry that it seeks to illuminate, so too the prosaic explication of how

70 For example, Afagddu is mentioned in *Angar Kyfundawt*, lines 11–14, as skilfully bringing forth poetry.

poetry came to be that characterises the *Ystoria Taliesin* is inimical to the earlier tradition and to poetry itself.

6.7 Henry Vaughan and the tradition of Welsh poetic inspiration

I consider in this section a text which lies outside the predominantly medieval and pre-medieval ambit of the main part of the study, but which is nonetheless highly instructive in the matter of how tradition is adapted to the cultural and temporal context in which it is refashioned. In 1694, the Welsh poet Henry Vaughan wrote to his cousin, the antiquary John Aubrey, in response to a request for some information about the remnants of Druidry in existence in Wales at that time:[71]

> I received yours & should have gladly served you, had it been in my power. Butt all my search of consultations with those few that I could suspect to have any knowledge of Antiquitie, came to nothing: for the antient Bards (though by the testimonie of their Enemies, the Romans:) a very learned societie: yet (like the Druids) they communicated nothing of their knowledge, butt by way of tradition: which I suppose to be the reason that we have no account left vs: nor any sort of remains, or other monuments of their learning, or way of living. As to the later Bards, who were no such men, butt had a societie & some rules & orders among themselves: & several sorts of measures & a kind of Lyric poetrie: which are all sett down exactly In the learned John David Rhees, or Rhesus his welch, or British grammer: you shall have there (in the later end of his book) a most curious Account of them.[72] This vein of poetrie they called Awen, which in their language signifies as much as Raptus, or a poetic furor; & (in truth) as many of them as I have conversed with are (as I may say) gifted or inspired with it. I was told by a very sober & knowing person (now dead) that in his time, there was a young lad father & motherless, & soe very poor that he was forced to beg; butt att last was taken up by a rich man, that kept a great stock of sheep vpon the mountains not far from the place where I now dwell. who cloathed him & sent him into the mountains to keep his sheep. There in Summer time following the sheep & looking to their lambs, he fell into a deep sleep; In which he dreamt, that he saw a beautifull young man with a garland of green leafs vpon his head, & an hawk vpon his fist: with a quiver full of Arrows att his back, coming towards him (whistling several measures or tunes all the way) & att last lett the hawk fly att him, which (he dreamt) gott into his mouth & inward parts, & suddenly awaked in a great fear & consternation: butt possessed with such a vein, or gift of poetrie, that he left the sheep & went about the Countrey, making songs vpon all occasions, and came to be the most famous Bard in all the Countrey in his time.
>
> [Added in a marginal note:] In Michael Psellus de Daemonibus is a story parallel to this, of one that dreamt a Crow flew into his mouth & entrails, whereby he had the gift of Prophesie.[73] See, in

71 I thank Adam Sargant for pointing out the Vaughan text.

72 Vaughan here refers to Siôn Dafydd Rhys's *Cambrobrytannicæ Cymraecæve linguæ institutiones et rudimenta*, published in 1592 (Rhæsus 1592).

73 This refers to a story of a raven in Michael Psellos's *De operatione daemonum*, which relates that a person at Elason, who delivered oracles in the manner of the priests of Phoebus, had learned his skills from a wandering African, who brought him by night to a certain mountain and made him partake of a herb, spat into his mouth, and anointed his eyes, so that he could see a host of spirits, from among

> the Life of Æsop [by Planudes], cap. [gap] how he had been civil to Diana's Priests; and after, had a dreame, that Diana came to him and gave him Wisdom.

The difficulty with Vaughan's account is that it is patent fabrication – in terms, that is, of its pretence at being part of ancient Welsh tradition relating to poetic vocation. Schapiro comments on it thus (1956, p. 155):

> The story seems to combine pagan Celtic, Greek and Christian Renaissance elements. [...] It is a tale about inspiration, and in the discovery or awakening of the poetic gift of a poor shepherd is like the story of Caedmon. The beautiful young man is evidently Apollo, the god of poetry, whose messenger to men is the hawk. According to the neo-Platonist, Porphyry (233–*c*. 304), an author read in the Renaissance, eating the heart of a hawk is the ingestion of the divine spirit and will power of prophecy [*De abstinentia ab esu animalium* II.48]. [...] The hawk entering his mouth and touching his inward parts suggests not only the Celtic legend of the poet eating a bird that gives inspiration, but also a Renaissance theme: God as a hawk which feeds on the soul and the heart [e.g. Alonso de Ledesma, *El nebli de amor divino*, "The hawk of divine love / Which has the soul for its prey / Feeds on hearts", from Otho Vaenius, *Amoris divini emblemata*, Antwerp, 1615].

Further points might be added to this: Apollo is associated both with mantic power (at his oracle at Delphi) and poetry, and the laurel (Vaughan's "green leaves") symbolised both. Arrows and hawks were his attributes, but they were also associated with his sister, the huntress Artemis (Diana), who certainly seems to have contributed to the image.[74] The greatest single classical element in the depiction, however, is the image of Hesiod being taught the skill of poetry by the Muses (the servants of Apollo) as he shepherded his sheep below Mount Helicon, recounted in his *Theogony*, lines 22–23.

Yet Vaughan's account cannot be dismissed on these grounds. There are several aspects which link it to earlier native tradition, apart from the general point that it relates to the traditional *awen*. Thus the deep sleep of enlightenment parallels that of Giraldus's *awenyddion* as well as the sleep of Ceridwen as the elixir of inspiration is produced, and the dark room of Gaelic bardic schools. The incorporation of elements of Diana the huntress into the image of the Apollonian young man reflects the traditional female guardianship of poetry, which finds expression in the *Ystoria Taliesin* in the person of the witch Ceridwen (and here it should be remembered that Diana in medieval and Renaissance times was chiefly remembered as a witch). Gruffydd's version of

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which a sort of raven flew towards him and descended down his throat into his stomach; thereafter, he was able to predict various matters, as the spirit within him desired.

74 Hesiod: *Theogony*, lines 918–919: 'Leto bore Apollon and Artemis, delighting in arrows, / Both of lovely shape like none of the heavenly gods.' Other classical references may also lie behind some of the depiction: Pliny (*Natural History* X.43) tells how a nightingale alighted on the mouth of Stesichorus, who then became a great poet; Pausanias (*Description of Greece* IX.23.2), Philostratus the Elder (*Imagines* II.12) and Aelianus (*Varia historia* XII.45) relate how Pindar fell asleep in the hot mid-day, and bees flew over him and deposited wax on him, after which he became a great poet; Jacobus de Voragine (*Legenda Aurea* I.25) tells how bees descended on the baby Ambrose in his crib, then flew up high, which his father interpreted to mean the boy would become great, if he survived.

the Taliesin story does not mention the hawk (he merely summarises, very briefly, the transformation into different beasts and the pursuit), but Morris's does – Ceridwen, as a hawk, is about to seize Gwion when he turns himself into a grain.[75] The pursuit by the hawk is realised differently in Vaughan's account, but in both cases the hawk represents the means to realise poetic talent, which relentlessly pursues its victim.

Vaughan's account therefore should be viewed as an updating of tradition rather than a fabrication. Its presentation as a 'friend-of-a-friend told me' account characterises it as an attempt to assert its traditionality rather than its non-tradition-based novelty. Tradition is always open to adaptation and outside influences, and a brief consideration of the cultural milieu in which Vaughan was operating will enable us to particularise features of this adaptation here. Vaughan was a reputable and successful poet, but his cultural focus lay within the English metaphysical tradition, following on from George Herbert (Davies 1995, p. 86). Despite this, he was proud of his Welsh heritage, as this letter amply demonstrates. His personal outlook therefore predisposed him to re-envisage Welsh tradition in a more metropolitan, classicised light. It is, I think, fairly clear that underlying the tale of the inspired shepherd is the story of Gwion Bach becoming Taliesin, the bard of princes, here recast along the lines of the classical model of Hesiod. Vaughan may well have felt that it was unnecessary to spell out the connection with Taliesin: not only was the tradition of Taliesin the inspired bard still commonplace in Wales, but it was also well known in England, as publications such as T. Pugh's *A Collection of British and Outlandish Prophecies*, from 1658, or *Forraign and Domestick Prophesies both Antient and Modern fore-telling The several Revolutions which shall yet befall the Scepter of England*, from 1659, demonstrate. Vaughan's letter is an attempt to bolster this already known tradition and reassert the value of traditional Welsh poetic culture and to suggest that it, too, could adapt to the metropolitan, classical mode of poetry. The models may have been Taliesin and Hesiod, but the shepherd boy from the Welsh hills who becomes a bard of princes is really a fictive version of Vaughan himself.

He may have had other factors in mind as well. The proffered time frame for this shepherd poet would place him in the early to mid-seventeenth century. This was exactly the time of Gruffydd (d. 1666) and Phylip Phylip (d. 1677) of Ardudwy, who were recognised as the last of the Welsh poets to work for princes (or, by this stage, nobles) in the traditional court metres. The ancient bardic tradition therefore lived on until Vaughan's youth, after which it might be said to have accommodated itself more readily to outside influences, in the way Vaughan's shepherd poet has adopted a classical dress. The classical influence on Welsh literature was always small, particularly within the traditional courtly poetry – though even here some classical themes

75 As noted, the Book of Taliesin contains poems (*Kat Godeu* and *Angar Kyfundawt*) where Taliesin declares he took the forms of various animals and so forth, which no doubt Gruffydd is alluding to in mentioning the transformations.

are found, for example in the verse of Siôn Phylip of Ardudwy (d. 1620) (Davies 1995, p. 83); but among Welsh scholars there was more widespread and growing enthusiasm for classicism, and as the traditional forms of poetry loosed their grip somewhat, there was greater scope for marrying the poetic and scholarly traditions. In broad terms, Vaughan himself may be said to have done this, though in English rather than Welsh, but others – albeit few in number – such as Rhys Cadwaladr, who was composing shortly before the time of Vaughan's letter, were able to write on classical themes in the traditional *cynghanedd* (Davies 1995, p. 88). Vaughan's letter thus emanates from a milieu of fragile strength: the gentry of Wales were increasingly anglicised, particularly since the time of the Civil War (Davies 1995, p. 86), and the age-old traditions of bardic composition were foundering, giving way to new forms. The long-term consequence of the Acts of Union of 1536 and 1543 may have been to open the cultural and educational horizons of Welsh citizens (Davies 1995, p. 54), but these horizons lay outside traditional Welsh culture. Yet Welsh culture, rather than meeting its demise, was confronted with fresh challenges: thus Vaughan's letter is an assertive exaltation of this culture's ability both to remain traditional and to adapt to the new, as epitomised in the expectations of people like the antiquarian Aubrey, who typified the cultural elite of the time in looking to classical models as the ideals of cultural expression.

7 Ireland: The spring of knowledge

Within Gaelic tradition, the motif of wisdom gained from the Otherworld attaches especially to the culture-hero Finn mac Cumaill. Before proceeding to discuss these traditions, however, it is worth expressing a caveat. There has always been a pervasive tendency to regard medieval (and indeed later) Irish traditions as very ancient; while there may be good arguments for this in particular cases, it must be remembered that, even if a tradition is of great antiquity, this does not amount to the same thing as saying that the particular form it is preserved in is of similar antiquity. Ó Cathasaigh (1984, pp. 292–295) notes that no narrative traditions are preserved in manuscripts antedating the late eleventh century, and "we can never hope to recover the pristine condition of any of our early texts", even if on linguistic grounds they are clearly based on earlier texts. Even allowing for the existence of such earlier texts, none predate the introduction of Christianity, so it is impossible to arrive at any form of traditions unadulterated by Christianity. Even by the seventh century, and more strongly by the eighth or ninth century, it is clear that originally oral traditions had been rendered into literary form, and while "the tendency has been to conduct the discussion of Irish texts principally in terms either of the artists who have produced them or of the universe which is reflected in them", there is "a pressing need to analyse the extant texts as literary works in their own right" (1984, p. 292). It may be over thirty years since Ó Cathasaigh made these points, but they remain just as pertinent today.

Many traditions have been recorded in medieval and later times relating to Finn's association with poetry and prophecy (for a perceptive analysis of the overall tradition, see particularly Nagy 1985). *Find* (the earlier form of his name) means 'bright' and designates a possessor of 'bright' knowledge (as the power of prophecy is designated), who himself becomes resplendent with it (Nagy 1985, p. 22). Poetry and mantic ability are inseparable (Nagy 1985, p. 24; cf. p. 27: the poet as prophet may have absorbed attributes earlier regarded as typical of the druid); Finn is presented as a composer not of court poetry in praise of kings but of (broadly) mantic poetry, dealing with supernatural persons, places and things, just as the adventures he and his followers engage in deal with the Otherworld. When not mantic, the poetry deals with nature: the first poem produced by Finn as he matriculates as a poet, according to the *Macgnímartha Finn*, was in praise of springtime. A poet is *fili* ('one who sees'): he sees what is and what will be; as Nagy notes (1985, p. 25), "the *fili* knows, 'sees', and can communicate because he is regularly transported into the otherworld, or because he becomes possessed by otherworldly inspirational forces". Another central feature of Finn is that he leads the life of an outcast, a *fénnid*, with a band of young followers in the wilderness. Implicit here is a tension of opposites: the *fili* who is central to society is an outcast. Yet the *fénnidecht* is an extrasocial life style that serves social purposes: "For the young member of society, like the wronged member of society, is peripheral to it and vulnerable in it: *fénnidecht* formulates the 'marginality' or 'liminality' of the young and the abused, providing them with a protective context and relieving society – both the *fine* ('family') and the *túath* ['wider community, tribe'] – of the responsibility of caring for these 'misfits'" (Nagy 1985, p. 20). Hence exclusion from society is ultimately a means of becoming integrated within it, and Finn the adventurer, the denizen of the wilderness, is the counterpart of Finn the poet, the raider of the Otherworld's prophetic powers. As Nagy notes (1985, p. 36):

> It is in the craftsman's peculiar freedom to cross over the boundaries separating *túatha* that we find the key to understanding the puzzling affinity between *filid* and social outcasts in myth. Since the *áes dána* [i.e. bards] enjoy a professional life style that transcends the normal social boundaries and the strictures of social behavior upholding those boundaries, they are depicted in myth both as eminent members of society and as mysterious outcasts.

The plying of the poet's craft, generated by supernatural essence, involves the transcendence of the poet's human limitations and the crossing of metaphysical boundaries between this world and the Otherworld.

7.1 The fairy cup

Little about Finn is found in the earliest texts. From the tenth century on, it appears that oral traditions about him came to be put into literary form; a number of these relate to his acquisition of Otherworld wisdom and poetic or prophetic powers.

Several tales in *Feis Tighe Chonáin* relate how Finn makes journeys into differing Otherworld settings and gains special powers there. The tale is not particularly ancient[76] but shows the well-established nature of the variations on the theme of the girl with wisdom-bestowing liquid, which the hero accesses in some way. I begin with these, since they exemplify the theme, in relatively unadulterated form, of how Finn gained his mantic powers from girls bearing vessels of water (O' Kearney [ed.] 1855, pp. 148–153, 170–177), a motif that bears comparison with Ceridwen's cauldron in Welsh tradition. I am not, it should be noted, arguing that the simplicity of the motifs here necessarily indicates they are any older, in their extant form, than other, more complex, forms of Otherworld inspiration gained by Finn.

a. Finn follows an ugly man and beautiful girl through a mist and finds himself in an otherworldly dwelling, where he drinks the water from two wells and gains wisdom.
b. Finn dives into a lake at Slíab Cuilinn in pursuit of a ring lost by a girl who promptly disappears into the lake once it is retrieved. Finn loses his strength, becoming a weak old man. His followers besiege the *síd* there, and Cuilenn ('Holly') emerges and gives Finn a beverage from a golden cup, bestowing wisdom on him and restoring his vigour, except that he is left with half his hair grey.
c. Finn and his companions approach the fountain of Bec, one of the Túatha Dé Danann, whose waters, for a fee, bestow wisdom and powers of prophecy, but the daughters of Bec rush up against them, one of them dousing them with a vessel of water from Bec's well, which spills into the mouths of Finn and his men, giving them knowledge.

The fairy woman with her goblet occurs elsewhere in Irish sources: for example, in the tenth-century *Áed Finn* ('The Island Protected by a Bridge of Glass'), a poem related to the voyage of Máel Dúin, a fair woman emerges from a stronghold and pours out fine liquor in the presence of the warriors who have sailed there, but offers none to them; when they complain, she closes the fortress against them, but they are enchanted into sleep by her music. The men wish to have sex with her, but, being sinless, she rejects this, instead asking them to ask her the secret of the island (which they fail to do).[77]

76 Manuscripts of the text date back to the sixteenth century; MacKillop (1998, s.v. *Feis Tighe Chonáin*) dates the tale to the fourteenth or fifteenth century.

77 The poem is given as no. 40 in Murphy (ed./transl.) 1962. The encounter with the lady with a glass bridge is found in the *Voyage of Máel Dúin* as a literary play on the encounter with an Otherworld woman found in *Immram Brain* (Bran is invited on his journey to the Land of Women by a female appearing to him in a dream: see Oskamp 1970, pp. 39–43), which, perhaps reflecting clerical prudishness, eschews the sexual intercourse of the latter (on the bridge of glass, see Oskamp 1970, pp. 45, 60, 62–63, 73, the standard edition of the *Voyage of Máel Dúin*). This possibly clerical development does not, however, bear particularly upon the specific motif of the fairy woman with her goblet, which has presumably become associated with the lady with the bridge from a wider folklore background.

7.2 The spring of knowledge

The wisdom-bestowing water borne by fairy women in vessels must, it is to be inferred, be drawn from an Otherworld source. A number of traditions are recorded concerned with such Otherworld wells.

The River Shannon (Sinann) took its name from the maiden Sinann, according to the legend recorded in the *Metrical Dindsenchas*, poem 54, *Sinann II*.[78] Sinann drowned in its source as she searched for mystic knowledge. The poem links various motifs: the well of inspiration, the hazel trees of the sage Crimall, the salmon which dwells in the spring and becomes wise from the nuts which fall in it, the connection of wisdom with a female 'guardian' (here metamorphosed into a victim who gives her name to the river), and the perils of acquiring Otherworld wisdom. Stanzas 3–6 read:[79]

Tipra Chonnlai, ba mór muirn,
bói fon aibeis eochar-guirm:
sé srotha, nárb inann blad,
eisti, Sinann in sechtmad.

Connla's well, loud was its sound,
was beneath the blue-skirted ocean:
six streams, unequal in fame,
rise from it, the seventh was Sinann.

Nói cuill Chrimaill, ind ḟir glic,
dochuiret tall fon tiprait:
atát le doilbi smachta
fo cheó doirchi dráidechta.

The nine hazels of Crimall the sage
drop their fruits yonder under the well:
they stand by the power of magic spells
under a darksome mist of wizardry.

I n-óen-ḟecht, amail nách gnáth,
ḟásas a nduille 's a mbláth: –
ingnad ciarsad sóer-búaid sin
's a mbeith i n-óen-úair abaig.

Together grow, in unwonted fashion,
their leaves and their flowers: –
a wonder is this, though a noble quality,
and a wonder their ripening all in a moment.

In úair is abaig in cnúas
tuitit 'sin tiprait anúas:
thís immarlethat ar lár,
co nosethat na bratán.

When the cluster of nuts is ripe
they fall down into the well:
they scatter below on the bottom,
and the salmon eat them.

The traditions about the Sinann are closely related to those about the Bóand (River Boyne; authorship of the poem *Bóand I* is also ascribed to Cúán ua Lothcháin). The source of both rivers is given the name Segais in different sources, and the salmon associated with the Shannon in the verses cited is elsewhere found in the Boyne. Toner (2014, p. 279) summarises the Rennes *Dindshenchas* of the Boyne River (Stokes 1894: §19):

78 The poem is ascribed in the Yellow Book of Lecan, *c.* 1400, to Cúán ua Lothcháin, d. 1024; it is preserved, *inter alia*, in the twelfth-century Book of Leinster.
79 Gwynn (ed./transl.) 1913, pp. 292–293; the account is also preserved in the twelfth-century prose *dindshenchas* "Sinann" and is alluded to elsewhere in early texts, such as section 11 of the eighth-century *Cauldron of Poesy* (Breatnach [ed.] 1981, pp. 66–67).

> Nechtan mac Labrada had a secret well (*tobair diamair*) at Síd Nechtain; whoever would go to it would not come from it without his eyes bursting, save Nechtan and his three cupbearers. His wife Bóand went through pride to test the well's power, and declared it had no mysterious power (*cumachta diamair*) that could harm her shape, and she walked withershins around it three times. Thereupon the well burst forth, depriving her of her thigh (*sliasait*), a hand and an eye. She fled with the water following behind to the Boyne mouth, where she died. The supposed power of the well is more fully described in the metrical version (Gwynn 1913: 28). The well is described there again as a secret well (*topur diamair*) in Nechtan's fort out of which issued every kind of malice (*mí-rún* lit. "evil secret/mystery"). No one could look into it without their eyes exploding in their head, and they would be disfigured, so no one dared approach it except for Nechtan and his three cupbearers. One day, buoyed up by her arrogance (*dosfuargaib a dímus*), Bóann approached the well to test its power (*d'airigud a chumachta*) and rashly (*co n-étuachli*) she circled the well three times. Three waves burst forth, one against her foot, one against her eye, and a third against her hand.

The drownings of Sinann and Bóand exemplify the widespread motif of drowning in a well, usually the result of enraging the well (Toner 2014, p. 276); Toner notes (2014, p. 282) that "[t]here is strong evidence in the *Dindshenchas* and related material of an idea that the land, and water in particular, were powerful forces that were sensitive to injustice and could react to or punish immoral or criminal acts". Bóand is beautiful, but as a result of her pride in looking at the well she becomes disfigured like one of the Fomoiri – monsters and agents of chaos – and takes on the appearance of one of the hags who appear at the hostels of Da Coca and Da Derga chanting ill-omens to the hero in a prefigurement of death and destruction; her drowning at the mouth of the Boyne indicates that she went under the sea, like the Fomoiri (Toner 2104, p. 280).[80] The well emerges, then, more as a source of destruction than accessible power: yet the fact that Nechtan has three cupbearers indicates that the power of the well may be accessed, provided it is mediated through the appropriate dispensers (Toner 2014, p. 279), a feature which is preserved too in the *Feis Tighe Chonáin* account of the well of Bec mac Buain.

Legends surrounding Nechtan and the Boyne appear to contain very ancient elements. Mac Mathúna (2014, p. 62; see also his contribution in the present volume) compares the dismemberment of Bóand when she tries the waters to the primordial world-creating dismemberment of Prajapati in India, to which might be added the

80 Given the close connection between the tales of Sinann and Bóand, it is perhaps worth noting that Sinann is related to Senos, 'the aged one', the form of the river name given by Ptolemy (and which in turn is potentially related to Sena, the otherworldly island overseen by seeresses in Pomponius Mela's account: see p. 506; cf. the Celtic tribe the Senones, with their city Sena Gallica: they are presumably 'people of Sena', after their goddess: Koch 2006, s.v. "Senones"). This indicates that in pagan times the river may have been associated with the sort of hag Toner mentions here. This need not indicate that the *Dindshenchas* tradition of a young maiden is a more recent invention: the female associated with the river could well have been a transformative being encompassing both youth and age, in the way the river itself does, passing from spring to estuary.

similar dismemberment of Ymir in Norse myth. The meaning of Bóand is more patent in the proto-Gaelic form recorded by Ptolemy: *Buvinda* ('White cow'); discussing the mythological significance of the cow in Irish and Indo-European traditions would require an extensive discussion too tangential for the present purposes, but we might note examples such as the Norse Auðumla (Snorri: *Gylfaginning*, ch. 5), involved in the primordial formation of the world and its denizens, as well as the putative proto-Indo-European sacrifice of the primordial cow by Man to form the world (see Lincoln 1976). Most pertinent to the present discussion, however, are the various aspects of the well.

In an article developing ideas first discussed by Dumézil, Ford (1974) notes how Nechtan is cognate with the Indian Napāt, occurring in the name Apām Napāt ('Offspring of the waters'; it is also probably cognate with the Latin Neptunus – on the connection between Indian, Irish and Latin traditions see Puhvel 1987, ch. 16, pp. 277–283). In the hymn dedicated to him in the *Ṛg Veda*, 2.35, Apām Napāt dwells in the waters, blazing brilliantly without fuel and shining forth clad in lightning, and is surrounded by maidens, the waters, who make him shine. He is the radiant divinity of the waters, who illumines and enriches those who honour him. In an Iranian parallel in Yašt 19 of the *Avesta*, Apam Napāt hides the *xvarənah*, the brilliant essence of kingship, in a mythical lake, Vourukaša; Frangrasyan attempts to seize it, much as Bóand attempts to secure the source of wisdom in Nechtan's well. As Dumézil had noted, the shattering of the eyes in this myth indicates that the power of the spring must have been realised in the form of some brilliant essence, though this is not stated in the sources directly. One of the names for poetic inspiration, however, *imbas forosnai*, means 'wisdom that illuminates' (*forosna* meaning 'lights up (or burns, as a candle), illumines, kindles, shines').

7.3 Sucking on the thumb

The Otherworld liquor thus appears, from ancient tradition, to be naturally bright, illuminating. Another tale of Finn where a girl bearing this Otherworld water is found is the tale of *The Death of Cúldub*; but here the motif is combined with others.[81] Finn and his companions are cooking at Badamair, and Cúldub emerges from a fairy mound on the plain of Femen and carries off their food. The same thing happens for three nights, but on the third occasion Finn rushes ahead to the fairy mound and intercepts Cúldub as he returns, grabbing at him as he enters the mound. A woman comes out of the mound, carrying a vessel dripping with drink that she has been distributing; she

81 The tale is preserved in the manuscript Trinity College H.3.18, from the sixteenth century, but the text may date to the ninth century; this is the opinion of Meyer (1910, p. xix), based on the occurrence of some Old Irish words, but he does not discuss the dating in any detail.

jams the door, but Finn puts his fingers into the gap, withdrawing them and putting them in his mouth after they are crushed. He is endowed with 'knowledge that illuminates' (*imbas forosnai*) and chants (and here some incomprehensible rhetoric is given). The story continues with incidents later when he is able to use the power he has gained to reveal secret knowledge.

Several motifs are worth highlighting here. The setting is a feast, which is interrupted but which provides the means for prophetic inspiration to be acquired. This inspiration is somehow connected either with retrieving the food stolen by the fairies or with a vessel of liquid borne by a female fairy being. The inspiration results in poetic and mantic expression as well as divinatory powers. There is, however, clearly some incoherence in this account. The inspiration must surely have been at an earlier stage more firmly linked to imbibing the fairy liquor, some of which must have ended up on Finn's hand, but this is left as an unproductive remnant feature in the extant account, being replaced with the notion of magical powers being gained by placing the hand in a fairy mound (a variant of ATU type 503, "The Gifts of the Little People"). The motif of prophetic power being gained by the accidental or rather instinctive placing of the fingers/thumb in the mouth after it has been in contact with the Otherworld is a constant feature, however.

Finn's sucking on his thumb as a means of realising supernatural prophetic powers is found in other sources; for example, in *Sanas Cormaic* ('Cormac's Glossary'), whose earliest manuscript dates from the fourteenth century, and whose language indicates an eleventh-century date, according to Stokes (1891–1894, p. 149),[82] Finn sucks on his thumb and chants, and through *ténm láida* ('illumination of song') is able to divine the identity of a body (*Sanas Cormaic*, s.v. *orc tréith*, Stokes 1891–1894, pp. 176–177). *Ténm láida* is a variant of *imbas forosnai*, the rite for the acquisition of which is also described in the same document, along with another ceremony, *díchetal di chennaib* ('incantation from tips'):[83]

> Himbas forosnai .i. dofuarascaib seicib cach ræt bid maith lasin filid 7 bud ádla[i]c dó do ḟaillsiugud. isamlaid dognither sin .i. cocnaid (no concna) infili mír do charnna dhergmuice no chon no chaitt 7 dosber iaram isin líg forachula na cómlad 7 canaid díchedul fair 7 hidbraid sin do dheib hídal. 7 gutagair dó iaram a hídalu. 7 nisfaghaib din iarnamárach. 7 docha[i]n brichta for a dhí baiss. contagair beos a dhee hídal chuige arna toirmesctha a chodlad immbe. 7 dosber a

82 Koch (2006, s.v. *Sanas Chormaic*) notes the shorter form of the Glossary as exemplified by the Leabhar Breac may be associated with Cormac ua Cuilennáin (d. 908), but how far the extant text may indeed go back to Cormac is not clear.

83 The text is taken from the version edited by Stokes (1862, p. 25; translation p. xxxvi, but supplemented from Stokes 1891–1894, pp. 156–157, which renders the very similar version from Bodleian, MS Laud 610) from Royal Irish Academy, MS H&S 224, which he regarded as a detached portion of the Leabhar Breac (RIA MS 23 P 16 or 1230), and as dating from the early fifteenth century. The versions of *Sanas Cormaic* are gathered at http://www.asnc.cam.ac.uk/irishglossaries/texts.php. For *imbas forosnai* and related means of securing poetic/mantic inspiration, Chadwick 1935 is still a useful study.

dí boiss ima díb lecnib contuil ísuan. 7 bíther oca fhaire ar na roimprá 7 narothairmesca nech cotaispentar dó cach ní immbambí cocend nómaide no a dó no a tri no fot no mhessedh oc hídbert. et ideo himbas dicitur .i. dí boiss uime .i. bass ádiu 7 bas anall ima leccnib. 7 atrogell no atrarpe tra (Patraicc) innísin 7 anteinm lægda .i. roforgell na bud nime na talman nach æn dosgní uair is díultad do baithis. Díchedul do chendaib din forfhacbad (són) a dénum side hi córus cerdi ar issed (so as) fodera són ni hécean hidbairt demun uime acht faisnes do chendaib cnáime fócetoir.

(*Imbas forosnai*, 'Manifestation that enlightens': it discovers what thing soever the poet likes and which he desires to reveal. Thus is this done, i.e. the poet chews a piece of the flesh of a red pig, or of a dog, or a cat, and puts it then on the flagstone behind the door, and chants an incantation over it, and offers it to idol-gods, and his idols are brought to him, and finds them not on the morrow, and he sings spells over his two palms, and his idol-gods are again brought to him, lest his sleep should be disturbed, and he puts his two palms on his two cheeks, and falls asleep, and people are watching him, so that none may disturb nor awake him, till everything which he is about be revealed to him, to the end of a *nómad* (three days and nights), or two or three, or as long as he is supposed to be (?) offering. And therefore is it called *Imbas*, i.e. his two palms (*bais*) about him, i.e. a palm over (*ádiu*) and a palm from the other side about his cheeks. Patrick banished that and the *Teinm láida*, 'illumination of song', and declared that no one who shall do that shall belong to heaven or earth, for it is a denial of baptism. *Díchetal do chennaib*, 'extempore incantation', however, that was left, in right of art, for it is science that causes it, and no offering to devils is necessary, but a declaration from the ends of his bones at once.)

All three types of inspiration, *teinm láida*, *imbas forosnai* and *díchetal di chennaib*, are brought together also in the *Macgnímartha Finn* ('The Boyhood Deeds of Finn'). This presents perhaps the most famous tale of how Finn gained his poetic and prophetic skills: Finnéces, who has spent seven years trying to catch the salmon of knowledge from a pool in the River Boyne, is visited by the young Finn, whereupon Finnéces catches the salmon and tells the boy to cook it for him. Finn burns his thumb and smarting from the pain places it in his mouth. Finnéces says the lad was destined to have the salmon and tells him to eat it. Thus Finn gains his prophetic knowledge, specified as *teinm láida*, *imbas forosnai* and *díchetal di chennaib*. He is subsequently able to gain insight by placing his thumb in his mouth whenever he needed.

The manuscript of *Macgnímartha Finn* is fifteenth century, though much of it can be traced to earlier sources – the extant form appears to be a terse summary of earlier, longer tales. However, the tale of the salmon of wisdom is not among those in the manuscript for which clear antecedents can be adduced from earlier manuscripts, and hence, in its extant form or anything closely resembling it, it cannot be shown to be particularly ancient. It would appear to be a summation and reconciling of the various older traditions that have been discussed here: thus, his mantic and poetic skills are conveniently and explicitly identified with the three ritually induced skills of the *Sanas Cormaic*, and the source of these skills is a deft combination of the thumb-sucking that, as seen, is found in various contexts as a source of Otherworld knowledge along with the wisdom of the Otherworld spring, mediated via the salmon of wisdom that lives in these waters. Such synthetic rationalisation of earlier,

disparate traditions increased as the encyclopaedic cataloguing tendencies of the Middle Ages progressed, but it can scarcely be precisely dated.

7.4 Finnéces and the legend of Sigurðr

The Finnéces story has a parallel in the Norse legend of the slaying of the dragon Fáfnir by the young Sigurðr, recounted in the poem *Fáfnismál* (the manuscript dates from *c*. 1270) and elsewhere in prose. Sigurðr acts at the behest of his master Reginn in killing the dragon, and he then cooks the dragon's heart for his master but – according to a prose summary between the verses of the poem – accidentally burns his finger when testing it and puts it in his mouth, upon which he understands the speech of the birds, telling him Reginn is planning to slay him, and to flee.

The relationship between the Irish and Norse legends is far from clear.[84] The following points may be highlighted:

1. The age of the legends is unknown in both traditions, but the Norse is recorded in writing several centuries earlier than the Irish tale of Finnéces (it is important here to recognise that even if some parts of the *Macgnímartha Finn* arguably may go back to the twelfth century, the tale of Finnéces is one for which any evidence of such an early date is singularly lacking).
2. The motif of cooking a serpent and, by eating it, gaining supernatural knowledge, specifically in the form of understanding bird/animal speech, is a Continental story motif, well recorded in folklore from Germany and in the twelfth-century Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* V.129.
3. Whether the tasting of the food which endows the hero with supernatural knowledge (or a comparable variant motif) is accidental or deliberate varies considerably. Whereas it is accidental in *Fáfnismál* and the prose associated with it, *Þiðriks saga*, written at about the same time as *Fáfnismál* was written down, has the motif of Sigurðr deliberately bathing in the dragon's blood to effect invulnerability. In the Welsh *Ystoria Taliesin*, one recension has Gwion deliberately seizing the potent liquor, the other presents it as accidental. Both the Finnéces tale and *Fáfnismál* have accidental consumptions, perhaps implying a link, but the variation in the motif in different traditions tends to point to this being coincidental.
4. *Fáfnismál* with its prose interludes has no fewer than three contacts with the dragon's flesh: Reginn drinking blood from its death wound (which, however,

84 Scott (1930), in his study of the thumb of knowledge in the Finn tales, devotes a chapter to the analogue, concluding the Norse tale has derived the motif of the accidental burning and tasting from the Finn story. There are various other parallels between the Finn and Sigurðr stories investigated by Scott, for which there is no space to discuss here, but which over all suggest that some link did exist between the narratives. It would, however, be a mistake to infer that Scott was able to solve the uncertainties of this relationship.

may well be the prose writer's misunderstanding of the verse), Sigurðr accidentally tasting the heart blood, and then his eating of the heart.[85] The first and third seem to relate to the motif of increasing prowess, with just the second relating to prophetic wisdom. This implies a fairly lengthy process of transmission, during which complexities were interwoven into the narrative.

5. By the tenth century, depictions from the Isle of Man and northern England, followed by others in Scandinavia, show Sigurðr holding up his thumb while cooking the dragon's heart, so the basic core of the tale was already in place by this time in Norse tradition (see Margeson 1983, pp. 100–105 for discussion of the Sigurðr depictions).
6. The Norse tale involves a dragon, which is a realisation of the commonplace serpent motif and the typical opponent of the hero; the serpent, naturally enough, is replaced in Irish tradition with a secondary motif, the salmon, and instead of being the hero's opponent is a bearer of Otherworld wisdom alone (which the dragon is too, in addition to being fierce). The *ad hoc* gaining of understanding of birds' speech, which acts as a warning to the hero, corresponds to a general gaining of Otherworld mantic skill in the Irish. The Irish is therefore typologically a secondary development, in several respects.
7. The motifs of knowledge gained from the Otherworld which meet up in the Finnéces story are themselves traceable to much earlier sources in Irish tradition.
8. The balance of probability is that the Norse tale represents the culmination of a development of motifs commonplace within the Germanic world, which centre around a hero proving himself against a serpent, and which incidentally involve the acquisition of supernatural knowledge for an *ad hoc* narrative purpose. This narrative has been adopted into Gaelic tradition and used to link together various motifs concerning the rather deeper matter of acquiring Otherworld mantic/poetic powers, and, in discarding the serpent in favour of the salmon, has emphasised the wisdom aspects of the Otherworld beast and downplayed the heroic contest motifs (indeed, Finnéces's seven-year 'contest' against the mighty salmon is surely deliberately mock-heroic). The Finnéces story exploits this narrative as part of a move to synthesise various earlier threads in Irish tradition concerning the acquisition of Otherworld mantic powers. If we assume some influence from Germanic tradition on Irish to have taken place – or, indeed, if the influence was after all the other way round – then the Isle of Man in around the tenth century, when the Sigurðr stones seem to have been carved, offers the most promising setting, an area of firmly Gaelic culture which was ruled over by Norsemen, and whose artwork displayed a synthesis between Gaelic and Scandinavian traditions.

85 The Finnéces story also has the repetition of the motif, with Finn first tasting the salmon, then being told he is to eat it. Other motifs are also paralleled: thus Finn at first goes by the name Demne, and it is only when he tastes the salmon that Finnéces reveals he is in fact called Finn; in the Sigurðr story, Fáfnir seeks to find out Sigurðr's name but is unable to trick the hero into giving it (it would give the dragon power over him).

7.5 Liminality

The symbolic significance of the way Otherworld knowledge is gained in the Irish traditions discussed above calls for some attention. In the ceremony of *díchetal di chennaib*, the tips of objects (including fingers) are used by a poet to gather information. The point about a tip, and hence of Finn's thumb or finger, is that it is liminal, on the boundary between the poet (the owner of the digit in question) and the outside world whence information is sought; more specifically, a tip focuses the essence of the entity to which it belongs down to a point – this surely commonplace notion is seen dramatically in Michelangelo's well-known depiction of the power of God passing to Adam through the finger tips in *The Creation of Adam* in the Sistine Chapel. The notion of liminality, often expressed through tips or tip-like objects, is in fact evident in many aspects of contact with the Otherworld in Irish texts, as Nagy has shown (1981–1982). The primary source of knowledge is a well in the Otherworld: a well, apart from clearly connecting the human world with the underworld, was traditionally located in the *les* or yard of a house, a liminal site between the inside and the outside world. The knowledge in the Otherworld well came from hazelnuts: nuts grow on the tips of the branches, concentrating the power of the plant (into something which can potently recreate the whole plant, indeed). The poet gained knowledge by eating a salmon which had eaten the nuts: the salmon thus links animal (fish) and vegetable, and the Otherworld, from which it has swum, and this world, where it is caught. The fish is caught from the liminal position of the stream bank. Finn uses his finger, his liminal extremity, to gain the salmon's knowledge. In the tale of Cúldub, Finn gains supernatural knowledge when liquid spills from the fairy cup at the liminal entrance to the *síd*. The tale of Cuilenn's replenishing of the decrepit Finn's strength after he has gained Otherworld wisdom is marked as liminal in the grey hair Finn retains, marking his newly liminal position between youth and age.

The liminal setting of Finn's acquisition of supernatural power is typically a feast; this is implicit in his consumption of the salmon which he cooks (Nagy 1985, pp. 155–156), but is more evident in the feast which is proceeding inside the *síd* in the tale of Cúldub. As Nagy (1981, p. 313) points out: "In the story of Finn stuck at the supernatural doorway, Finn is shut out by a female carrying a vessel, the contents of which she has just distributed to those in the dwelling. He is thus disrupting a feast, where a liquid of knowledge is being consumed. Some of the remaining fluid in the vessel drops upon his finger, and so Finn acquires supernatural knowledge; his finger, as well as his identity, are radically changed"[86] He also notes (1985, p. 130): "This incident at the entrance to the otherworld is filled with starkly peripheral things: a door, a

86 Nagy (1985, p. 313) adds in a note: "It is not explicitly stated in any surviving version of this story [...] that the liquid dripped upon Finn's stuck finger, but this detail can be assumed on the basis of a comparison of this tale with a close variant".

female doorkeeper, the corpse of a freshly slain commuter between worlds, the spear point by which he was laid low, the last drops of beverage in a vessel, and the extremity of Finn's hand."

The pervasive symbolism of food is also liminal in various ways. The salmon is a source of Otherworld wisdom only when it is cooked, an act of passage from the raw state (unsuitable for human consumption, like the food of the Otherworld) to a state edible by humans. When he chews on his finger/thumb, Finn 'consumes' raw food, which belongs to the Otherworld, subverting human norms and breaking down the boundary between the consumer and the consumed, between raw and cooked, between nature and culture. Nagy notes (1981, p. 314) that Finn's sucking on his thumb is equivalent to his becoming food for otherworld characters in their *bruidhean* or *síd*; this raw food may be seen as an Otherworld antithesis of the cooked food of humans, which subjects him to the power of the Otherworld – from which, however, he wrests himself, retaining the supernatural powers it has bestowed on him. In a brilliant analysis of the salmon episode, Nagy (1985, pp. 157–158) shows the importance of cooking as a symbol for the transition from nature to culture: "The gilla [young man acting as servant and apprentice], a living symbol of transition, is asked to effect the transformation of the salmon from raw to cooked, and of the knowledge it contains from wild and inaccessible to cultural and usable." The *gilla*, in preparing the food for the poet Finnéces, becomes a cook, a consumer, and an odd sort of cooked commodity himself (he burns his finger and licks himself). Finn "absorbs the entire cooking situation: he cooks the salmon, is burnt while cooking it, and puts his quasi-cooked finger in his mouth as if it were the food to be eaten. In the end he himself eats the cooked salmon. Demne [i.e. Finn] becomes a poet and seer as a result of the gilla's ability to become anything, to be anywhere – and thus to know everything." The cook is cooked, and the *gilla* becomes his own master, Finn taking the poetic accolade from Finnéces.[87] But these abnormal transitions appear normal when viewed metaphorically: the youth is cooked, i.e. matures, and the younger generation succeeds the older.

8 Anglo-Saxon England: The poet Cædmon

Here I consider a text from England, from a time and place which was on the interface between paganism and Christianity, and the Germanic and Celtic worlds. It does not

87 The same symbolism might be applied to the parallel Welsh tale of Gwion Bach. Just as the acolyte Demne becomes the master poet Finn, so too the servant boy Gwion becomes the great Taliesin. Gwion 'eats himself' in licking up the drops of poetic inspiration from the cauldron, but also, insofar as he is 'Poison', he is 'eaten up' in the destruction of the poison as the cauldron bursts, giving rise to the drops that survive to endow the poet. He is further consumed, as a grain, by Ceridwen (or, following Haycock's reading of the *Angar Kyfundawt*, by a heating kiln metaphorised as a hen), the mistress of the cauldron and hence of poetry, and is born as a poet, Taliesin, from this 'mother of poetry'.

directly witness to some of the major motifs that characterise mythological and poetic traditions of the acquisition of Otherworld knowledge and poetic skill, yet it plays upon them in ways which offer interesting insights into the development of traditions.

8.1 Bede's tale of Cædmon

The Old English ecclesiastical historian Bede, writing in the 730s, tells the tale of the monk Cædmon from the mid-seventh century. Cædmon had spent the latter part of his life in a monastery composing religious verse, but Bede tells how he originally acquired this gift of poetry:[88]

> Siquidem in habitu saeculari usque ad tempora prouectioris aetatis constitutus, nil carminum aliquando didicerat. Vnde nonnumquam in conuiuio, cum esset laetitiae causa decretum ut omnes per ordinem cantare deberent, ille, ubi adpropinquare sibi citharam cernebat, surgebat a media caena et egressus ad suam domum repedabat.
>
> Quod dum tempore quodam faceret, et relicta domu conuiuii egressus esset ad stabula iumentorum, quorum ei custodia nocte illa erat delegata, ibique hora conpetenti membra dedisset sopori, adstitit ei quidam per somnium, eumque salutans ac suo appellans nomine "Caedmon", inquit, "canta mihi aliquid." At ille respondens "Nescio" inquit "cantare; nam et ideo de conuiuio egressus huc secessi, quia cantare non poteram." Rursum ille qui cum eo loquebatur "At tamen" ait "mihi cantare habes." "Quid" inquit "debeo cantare?" Et ille "Canta" inquit "principium creaturarum." Quo accepto responso, statim ipse coepit cantare in laudem Dei Conditoris uersus quos numquam audierat:[89]
>
> Nu scylun hergan hefaenricaes uard,
> metudæs maecti end his modgidanc
> uerc uuldurfadur, sue he uundra gihuaes,
> eci dryctin, or astelidæ.
> He aerist scop aelda barnum
> heben til hrofe, haleg scepen;
> tha middungeard moncynnæs uard,
> eci dryctin, æfter tiadæ
> firum foldu, frea allmectig.
>
> Exsurgens autem a somno, cuncta quae dormiens cantauerat memoriter retenuit, et eis mox plura in eundem modum uerba Deo digni carminis adiunxit.
>
> (He had lived in the secular habit until he was well advanced in years and had never learned any songs. Hence sometimes at a feast, when for the sake of providing entertainment, it had been decided that they should all sing in turn, when he saw the harp approaching him, he would rise up in the middle of the feasting, go out, and return home.

88 Bede: *Historia ecclesiastica* IV.24, Colgrave / Mynors (eds.) 1969, pp. 414–415.
89 I omit Bede's Latin version and description of the hymn, and instead cite the early Northumbrian English version from the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records version (with the editorial comma at the end of line 2 removed to reflect the interpretation adopted here); the translation is mine.

> On one such occasion when he did so, he left the place of feasting and went to the cattle byre, as it was his turn to take charge of them that night. In due time he stretched himself out and went to sleep, whereupon he dreamt that someone stood by him, saluted him, and called him by name: "Cædmon", he said, "sing me something." Cædmon answered, "I cannot sing; that is why I left the feast and came here because I could not sing." Once again the speaker said, "Nevertheless you must sing to me." "What must I sing?" said Cædmon. "Sing", he said, "about the beginning of created things." Thereupon Cædmon began to sing verses which he had never heard before in praise of God the Creator:
>
> Now must the works of the glory-father praise the guardian of the heaven-realm,[90] the creator's might and the thought of his spirit, as he, eternal lord, laid down the beginning of every wonder. He, holy shaper, first shaped heaven as a roof for the children of men. Then the guardian of mankind, eternal lord, afterwards made the middle garth, the earth for men, lord almighty.
>
> When he awoke, he remembered all that he had sung while asleep and soon added more verses in the same manner, praising God in fitting style.)

Bede lived within a mere century after the successful introduction of Christianity to Northumbria by King Oswald, from 635 on, and the protagonists of his history of Christianisation, such as Cædmon, lived yet closer to this advent of the new faith. We need not doubt the sincerity of the devotion to Christ, but stories such as Cædmon's are likely to have derived from long-standing, and hence originally pagan, traditions and been viewed by an audience imbued with pre-Christian outlooks in ways that fall outside Bede's strictly Christian viewpoint.[91]

8.2 The context of the Cædmon tale

Many modern approaches to Cædmon tend to view his story as unreliable, or even as wholly fabricated. Yet – to make a sweeping statement, but one which is nonetheless, I think, valid – Bede generally presents information which is reliable (as far as he was able to ascertain), but which is always sifted through the filter of Christianity. I am not concerned here with establishing the facts of what happened to Cædmon. Bede's account is no doubt derived from several retellings which ultimately go back not to the

90 Although Bede translates the opening as 'now we must praise', and the West Saxon versions of the hymn (bar one) and two of the Northumbrian versions follow suit, the earliest Northumbrian versions and one West Saxon do not include 'we', and so the subject is most obviously taken to be the works of the creator that are to praise him. Bruce Mitchell considers this problem, and concludes that the listeners of the hymn at an early stage as it were 'heard' (to themselves) slight variants, depending on their expectations, which subsequently came to be preserved in the written tradition (with Bede clearly basing his translation on a 'we' version). I prefer the version without 'we', as the syntactical *lectio difficilior* and as it effects a better flow to the verse (though this is admittedly a subjective matter).
91 I am aware of the existence of the unpublished doctoral dissertation by Ireland (1986), "The Celtic Background to the Story of Cædmon and his Hymn", but, despite much effort, it has proved impossible to obtain a copy.

poet's experience itself but to Cædmon's interpretation of what happened to him. We have, then, filtered interpretations but not, I believe, inventions. Niles questions the account as relating anything reliable about poetic vocation; he observes (Niles 2003, p. 16): "If lurking beneath Bede's account there does exist an historical Cædmon, then that man would have mastered the arts of song gradually as he matured from being a passive tradition-bearer to being an active or strong one." Yet this misses the point: Cædmon was not a run-of-the-mill oral poet but someone exceptional, and the way he attained his ability was also exceptional. He must have learnt his skill, of course, presumably for example at the many feasts from which he withdrew but where he would have heard verse being sung. He could, however, have felt an *impasse* against producing anything himself until this was freed. This, at least, would seem feasible on the personal level, but more important is to realise that the tradition of how he gained poetic powers encapsulates something wider, namely how religious verse came to be composed in English: this is a matter of how one or more cultures are assimilated, giving rise to a new potential for poetic expression. Cædmon is an embodiment of a cultural movement – though this does not mean he was not also real as an individual and a poet.

The new Christianity of the English realm seems to have acted as a catalyst for Cædmon in what we might term a personalised cultural reaction between the Germanic and Celtic cultures which were vying with each other at this time in northern Britannia. Cædmon belonged to the English world of Northumbria as a middle-ranking member of society, a farmer who looked after animals, but also engaged in entertainments in the hall. It is natural therefore to look to other, better-recorded, Germanic traditions, in particular the Old Norse, to illuminate the possible Germanic background to the Cædmon story. Yet Cædmon bears a name which is Welsh: it occurs in Welsh sources for other individuals, in the earlier form Catumanus, and later Cadfan, and means, roughly, 'warrior'. The English lordship over most of Northumbria was little older than their adoption of Christianity: from fairly small enclaves, mostly in the Wolds of the East Riding of Yorkshire and further north along the coast beyond the Yorkshire Moors, they expanded their power massively in the late sixth and early seventh centuries. There are differing opinions on the extent of English settlement and how far the native population was absorbed rather than displaced (see the varied contributions to Higham 2008), but it seems most probable that a large part of the population the English ruled at this time was in fact Welsh (British), and at the time of Cædmon's birth it is likely many still spoke Welsh as their first language. It is possible that his name was simply borrowed by the English and that he was an English thorough-bred. Rather more likely is that he was of Welsh descent, for example the son of an English father and Welsh mother. It is probable too that the Welsh at this time were Christian (though it is clear from later medieval sources that many originally pre-Christian traditions must have survived among them), and that this Christianity was suppressed for a time under the pagan English but not really eradicated; it is noticeable, for example, how easy the baptism of Northumbria (ultimately abortive, it

is true) by Edwin in the 620s (Bede: *Historia ecclesiastica* II.14) proved to be – much of the populace must have been of Welsh, and thus Christian, origin. In addition, there is the further possibility of another Celtic cultural input, for the Christianity that Oswald introduced was brought with him from his exile in Scotland, and such contacts must surely have brought further Gaelic traditions, both religious and secular, in their wake.

Cædmon's achievement then was to integrate the foreign culture of Christianity into English tradition, symbolised and represented by the wresting of the form of traditional heroic verse away from non-religious themes and using it to make quasi-traditional verse filled with Christian motifs. It can only be speculation, but I suggest that the background to this new synthesis was a perception that Christianity needed to be integrated in English culture as it had once been in Welsh, a synthesis that had been swept away by the pagan English take-over, but which now, as someone with roots in the erstwhile Welsh culture of the region would be aware, needed restoring. It is even possible – to stretch speculation perhaps further than it should be stretched – that what caused Cædmon such consternation was not so much his inability to sing as his inability to sing in English: it is certainly striking how he stands in contrast to all the others who attended the feasts, and while Bede's take on this as being a matter of personal diffidence is possible, it is as likely that he felt culturally isolated, unable to engage in this particular way of dealing with things. If he were familiar, for example in a home environment, with Welsh forms of song, this would set up a cultural discord or tension within him, which the *somnium* he experienced enabled him to release, transferring and transforming what was familiar to him from one cultural milieu to another in a sudden insight into how to perform in English. Explicit in the message of the dream figure is that Cædmon should sing of the creation, in other words Christian songs; the problem with the English singing he had heard so often around him was that it was not Christian, as (by this date) many of the songs sung by Welsh speakers, which perhaps Cædmon was familiar with, would have been, and as was demonstrably the case with Gaelic verse produced in the heart of Oswald's Christian exile, at Iona.

In Christian terms, Cædmon should perhaps be characterised as above all a prophet, in the biblical sense of someone who sees divine truths and proclaims them. The prophetic theme of calling for an immediate change of heart to honour God is emphasised in the opening word of the hymn, 'now', and Cædmon's own life itself shows the implementation of this conversion. The prophetic aspect of Cædmon has been emphasised by Shepherd (1954), who notes how the vision is part of a tradition (though it antedates most other examples cited and may have influenced them) in which an encounter with the Otherworld leads to an increased understanding of the nature of the afterlife and man's human destiny, and acts as a spur to live a better life and proclaim the message to others. This is exemplified by the Irishman St Fursey; Bede (*Historia ecclesiastica* III.19) gives a summary account of him based on an earlier Life. He had three trance visions in which he was borne aloft by angels and heard the heavenly choir singing – and hence may be said to have been presented with a gift of divine song during a heavenly vision, in the same way as Cædmon.

Shepherd notes (p. 122) the underlying Christian notion of inspiration, that the Word (Christ) presents the word to the poet, an idea made explicit by Aldhelm and Alcuin but also implicit in Bede, who saw the composition of religious verse as parallel to the Pentecostal gift of tongues, by which the Christian message was to be preached to all nations.[92]

Fundamental as Christianity is to understanding Cædmon and his place in the progression of English culture, his achievement and the circumstances of his vision are to be seen as a synthesis of various cultural traditions such as have been discussed in this survey.

8.3 Cædmon and the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*

Cædmon's story hardly displays anything resembling the age-old cattle raid, such as is enshrined in imaginative form in the Greek *Hymn to Hermes*. Yet his leaving the feast to take up company with his cattle is perhaps a faint echo of this tradition. Cædmon is unable to attain full membership of the feasting *comitatus*, as he is unable to sing (specifically heroic songs, it is to be understood); his 'prowess' is proved by, or results from, his sojourn in the byre. The song he sings, praising God and the ordering of the cosmos, displays the same pattern as that of Hermes. The Cædmon story is more complex, in that it also intimates the symbolic 'rite of passage' of the whole community, from paganism to Christianity, as well as the personal passage that Cædmon undertakes, so Cædmon does not attain membership of the *comitatus* he left but of the new Christian community. Just as Hermes was able to sing of divine matters, so too Cædmon sang of the Christian God, outdoing the merely human concerns of the heroic *comitatus*. At the same time, Cædmon's visit to the byre can be seen as an inversion of the traditional raid: instead of performing heroic exploits, he sleeps; instead of setting off into the wild, he retires to a shelter; and instead of stealing other people's cattle, he looks after his own. This inversion surely symbolises the wholesale inversion of society that the adoption of the new faith entailed.

8.4 Cædmon and Germanic tradition

Lerer (1991, pp. 42–48), while acknowledging Scandinavian parallels, pursues a similar argument, regarding the Cædmon story as a rejection, within a Christian culture, of traditional ideas of poetic inspiration being associated with the consump-

92 Shepherd cites Bede: *Vita Cuthberti*, Procœmium, Patrologia Latina 94, col. 577; Aldhelm: *De laudibus virginum*, Patrologia Latina 89, col. 239; *Aenigmatum liber*, Prologus, Patrologia Latina 89, cols. 183–184; Alcuin: *De pontificibus et sanctis ecclesiae Eboracensis*, Patrologia Latina 101, col. 814.

tion of beer (Cædmon famously absents himself from the feasting). Lerer is probably essentially correct, yet some caution is needed. The linking of poetic inspiration with alcoholic drink was a Norse feature (probably a refinement of a more ancient general notion of the drink of immortality), which, while it may have existed in England, cannot be demonstrated to have done so. Even if we allow Lerer's argument to stand, that Bede's account reflects a knowledge of the traditional Germanic notion of poetic inspiration coming from drink, of which it is a sort of inversion (drink is to be replaced with inspiration from God),[93] the reading of the Norse myth seems somewhat misplaced: it was never mere drinking in the hall that provided a source of poetic inspiration, but the acquisition of the special mead of poetry, gained through perilous exploits very far from the hall community. Hence, Cædmon's faring into the 'wilds' of the byre may be seen as a parallel to Óðinn's visit to Suttungr's mountain fastness to gain poetic inspiration, and so Bede in fact follows rather than rejects the traditional narrative (if traditional it be, in an Anglo-Saxon context), though the observation on the displacement of alcohol by Christ still stands. Lerer also sees the Óðinnic ingestion of mead as being replaced by a different sort of ingestion, in the form of the *ruminatio*, chewing on the cud, that Cædmon engaged in after he heard biblical tales and then worked them into fine poetry. However, there is no real departure from any pagan tradition here: the myth of the poetic mead could only ever have been seen as a mythic event, not a reflection of how any poets actually worked (involving more perspiration than inspiration) in the pagan period any more than in the Christian. The process of *ruminatio* might indeed be compared with the latter part of the Norse myth of poetry in which Óðinn ingests the mead, then carries it away before spewing it up (expressing it as verse?) into vats in his home fortress.

The tale of Hallbjǫrn shows many points of comparison with the Cædmon story. Both would-be poets are of fairly lowly background, tenders of animals, and both retreat to the periphery of society by resorting to the lonely byre or the mound where the sheep graze – a sort of 'Otherworld' setting. Both are embarrassed by their lack of poetic talent, and both are granted the gift by a dream visitor, a denizen of this 'Otherworld', going on to become renowned poets themselves. It is possible that the Cædmon story was known to the Icelandic author, who has been inspired to lend the tale a humorous flavour lacking in Bede, though, as noted, the widespread notion of wisdom gained from the dead or the spirit world is surely the main ingredient of the tale: hence poetry is linked to the wider theme of magically acquired wisdom. This, indeed, underlies the Cædmon story too, since its theme is essentially concerned not with verse *per se* but with the Christian message preached through verse.

93 This supposed development is comparable to that undergone later by *awen*, as noted above, from being the outpouring of a pagan cauldron to being the result of divine inspiration.

8.5 Cædmon and *awen*

Welsh traditions of *awen* show a depth of engagement with the imagery of poetic inspiration that finds only a limited correspondence in the tale of Cædmon. Perhaps the most obvious link is the way the *awenyddion* of Giraldus's account fall into a sleep and are given supernatural inspiration, waking up as poets (*cantori*); yet whereas Giraldus focuses on the fact that these seers remembered nothing of what they uttered in trance, Bede is careful to point out that Cædmon remembered everything. The cauldron of Welsh tradition suggests feasting: yet it was avoidance of the feast that brought inspiration to Cædmon, not participation in it. He flees the company of warriors rather than going on anything like a raid with them to achieve mastery of poetry, as is found in the *Preideu Annwfyn*. Here too we observe the inversion of tradition in Cædmon's story which was noted above, represented in the avoidance of the warrior feast: this highlights how he marks a new beginning, an important member of the new community of Christ. Yet the achievement is the same: Christ bestows the skill to sing of the reality of existence, whether this is the result of avoiding the imagery of the traditional warrior life in Cædmon's case, or exploiting and developing this imagery in the case of *Preideu Annwfyn*.

It is difficult to make use of Vaughan's account as an analogue to the tale of Cædmon, in that Bede may well have been one of Vaughan's sources. The fact that sleep, and trance, enter into a number of accounts of poetic inspiration tends to suggest that Cædmon's tale is here typical of how poetic inspiration was believed to be bestowed, but we cannot put this more strongly on the basis of Vaughan's account. One important inference to draw from the examination of the Welsh texts considered in this survey, particularly those of Elis Gruffydd and Henry Vaughan, however, is that if tradition can be adapted to fit the needs of a culture in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, the same applies to traditions reported from the seventh or any other century. As far as Bede's account goes, we may see such adaptation in the 'Christ' figure who addressed Cædmon, who is surely an updated realisation of a variable traditional Otherworld figure.

8.6 Gaelic (Irish and Scottish) influences

Niles (2006) has pointed out an analogue to the Cædmon story in an Irish/Scottish folktale, Irish type 2412B, "The man who had no story". He summarises it thus:

> A man gets lodgings at a house one night. After a meal, he is asked to tell a story or to sing a song. When he replies that he can do neither, he is asked to go outside on some errand, and for several hours he has fantastic experiences. When he returns to the house, exhausted, next morning and tells the people there about what he has suffered, they tell him that he will always have that, as a story, to tell in future. (p. 143)

Niles also notes that many examples of this type include the point that the protagonist is called by name by Otherworld-type beings that he encounters, whom he has

never before seen but who know who he is. It is possible that the tale type was once more widespread, but Niles notes that as recorded it is distinct to Ireland/Scotland. There are, of course, differences from the Cædmon tale: Cædmon is not sent on an errand but leaves because he wishes to; the folktale has no religious overtones (but their presence of course may be seen as Bede's, and maybe Cædmon's, particular adaptation of the tale); it has no aftermath, which is important in the Cædmon tale. Thus it does not explain everything about the Cædmon tale, but Niles is surely correct in seeing an exemplar of this tale type as forming the deepest narrative stratum of Bede's account. This in turn suggests that the cultural input to Cædmon's tale is not merely Anglo-Saxon and perhaps Welsh (as well as Christian) but also Gaelic (Irish/Scottish). The political situation was, of course, such that influence of this sort may well have been strong, since King Oswald had been in exile in Scotland, and the Christianity he brought with him a few decades before Cædmon's time, and which was now in place in Northumbria, was of the Irish/Scottish type. Oswald may also have been responsible for the taking of Lothian from the Gododdin by 655, pushing Northumbrian political sway close to Gaelic areas to the west (Charles-Edwards 2013, p. 392). The Gaelic-speaking areas of western Scotland were, of course, at this time an integral part of the Irish cultural domain, so influences might reasonably have been sought from a wide Gaelic-speaking area.

On the legendary plane, much of the background context of Finn the poet is implicit in the tale of Cædmon. He turned away from what must have been the mainstream of Anglo-Saxon poetry, praise poems for kings and princes, and composed spiritual verses, with a strong theme of nature evident in his hymn. His story is a sort of microcosm of Finn's: Cædmon did not live in the wilderness, yet he pays a visit to the byre, a trip into a sort of wilderness away from the hall, and he has a supernatural encounter there, a visitation from the Otherworld which endows him with poetic skill. This skill, gained as an outcast, enables him to take up a central position as a sort of *fili* to the reformed society of the monastery, central to the spiritual life of the newly Christian community. It seems debatable, however, how far these correspondences go beyond commonplaces arising from the approximately equivalent nature of the societies in question.

More specific Irish influence on Old English verse has been acknowledged, with poems such as *The Seafarer* exhibiting strong similarities with Irish traditions of *peregrinatio* and spiritual encounters with nature, which is incipiently evident already in Cædmon's *Hymn*. Indeed, Henry (1966, ch. xii) sees a clear Irish origin to the hymn. He cites the following Old Irish poem, dating possibly (but not necessarily) to the time of Bede or earlier, as the source:

Adram in Coimdid	Let us adore the Lord,
cusnaib aicdib amraib	Maker of wondrous works,
nem gelmár co n-ainglib,	Great bright Heaven with its angels,
ler tonnbán for talmain.	The white-waved sea on earth.

Henry certainly overstates his case on the basis of the brief and fairly imprecise parallels, which could have arisen independently in two Christian poetic traditions, yet the existence of such praise poems to the Lord, relating the wonders of his creation, in early Irish tradition may perhaps suggest some Irish Christian cultural context behind Cædmon's verse: the newly Christian English would be inspired to emulate the better-established Irish culture in its production of religious verse of this sort.

Ireland (2005) draws comparisons between Cædmon and the historical Irish poet Colman mac Lénéni, who lived about a century before Cædmon. Both were inspired to produce religious poetry in sleep (Ireland 1997, p. 3), perhaps suggesting some cultural link between the stories (though the points of comparison are somewhat vague), but Ireland is most concerned to illustrate the many ways in which they differed. Colman, like Cædmon, became a monk and religious poet, but this followed a career as a secular poet, whereas Cædmon had no such career. Yet it is possible to take a somewhat different approach to the two poets, with the proviso that it means viewing Bede as somewhat 'economical with the truth', and is therefore speculative. Bede's presentation of Cædmon as being devoid of any skill or interest in poetry before his vision is, in any case, not borne out by the recognisably traditional nature of the verse he produced: as with Colman, there is in fact a secular form of expression underlying it, derived from heroic verse, however this has arrived in Cædmon's mind. To an extent, it may be more illuminating here to view Cædmon less as an individual and more as a part of a developing tradition: clearly, a good deal of heroic verse was produced in his community, and he directs this tradition to religious ends. Ireland (2005, p. 174) stresses that Iona, in the heart of Gaeldom, was a productive centre of both religious and secular verse in the seventh century, so Cædmon's achievement might be viewed in a slightly different light, as bringing to fruition the potential to produce something similar in Northumbria, a society that produced both heroic and religious verse in forms with their roots in tradition. By ignoring the secular verse, Bede skews the overall picture and downplays the achievement of emulating the poetically multifarious Iona in the newly Christian English realm – as is no surprise, given Bede's antipathy both to secular and to native British Christian culture.

8.7 Cædmon and shamanism

Cædmon follows the pattern of shamanic initiation fairly closely. He stands out from his community, unable to take part in the singing, and usually goes home. Then, he effectively makes an Otherworld journey: the byre contrasts with the hall, which in Anglo-Saxon culture represents the society of men as so clearly symbolised in Heorot in *Beowulf*. The byre, then, homely as it may seem, in fact represents the wild, and Cædmon's visit there is a passage from the world of men, the hall, to that of the wild; and here, in sleep (like trance), he is visited by a spirit, which is equivalent to his journeying to the world of the spirits, where he is initiated and in a sense 'reborn' into

a mastery of the new faith (rebirth being a central theme of Christian baptism and theology in general, even if it is not made explicit in the Cædmon account); he is then able to enunciate the teachings to his people, in the form of Christian song.

There is, however, a magisterial adaptability in the imagery here. On another level, the byre alludes to the stable where Christ is born, and Cædmon, seeing to his cattle, is like the shepherds who watched the flocks by night as the angel of the Lord came down and they witnessed the birth of Christ; the biblical background to the stable or cave imagery represents not so much the wilderness but a different motif, the *kenosis* of the godhead in this lowly setting. It hints here at the birth of Christian inspiration among the lowly animals of Cædmon's byre. Moreover, from a shamanic perspective, Christ himself could be viewed as a shamanic neophyte, initiated through his birth in the stable to serve his community (the Church he founds): this forms the model for his followers, who are reborn in him to serve the community of Christian folk. Also, just as Christ moves in his life story from the lowly stable to his dwelling in heaven after his Ascension, so Cædmon returns, not to the worldly hall of men but to the house of God, the monastery of Streoneshalh. The story thus strikes home through the richness of its imagery both for Christians and for those steeped in a then more traditional understanding of the spirit world (whom Bede ignores).

8.8 Conclusion

Some elements of Cædmon's story can be seen to fit into the wider context of poetic inspiration that has been investigated here, though much of this context also has little ostensible bearing on Cædmon. The cauldron does not occur in the Cædmon tale; however, a cauldron might be viewed as a metonym of the feast, which is the setting for Cædmon's acquisition of poetic inspiration – though here, as with other aspects of the tale, it is a rejection of the setting that instigates the events that lead to his vision. The byre he flees to is a liminal place, a habitation on the edge of a farm but not for humans; liminality is a feature of much of the interaction for example of Finn with the Otherworld. Fleeing to a house of cattle perhaps recalls the age-old cattle raid: yet it is the opposite of a raid, with Cædmon going to tend his animals, not steal someone else's. Cædmon makes a journey to this liminal, 'otherworldly' place, yet he does not seek to take anything from it, as does Óðinn on his raid of Suttungr's mountain or Hallbjǫrn lying on the poet's grave, but rather to eschew something he did not want to do – perform poetry – in the hall; again, this is an inversion of the traditional quest, though it is characteristic too of the shaman's calling (and in this respect Cædmon could be said to be more of a shaman than a poet). Cædmon's vision in his sleep is a typical way in which inspiration is gained, to which many parallels might be drawn. Although some weaknesses were pointed out above, p. 541, in the balance of Lerer's arguments for seeing Cædmon's story as a rejection of Germanic traditions of poetic inspiration, there are in fact grounds for accepting the general premise as an element

in the tale. The story references at least some of the motifs that have been found to be typical of both Celtic and Germanic traditions, but recasts them, often by inverting them, in order to show that we have something new here as well as traditional, a way of accommodating the vernacular poet in the new, Christian world.

9 Conclusion

Poets weave complex webs of imagery of how their craft originated. These webs, I have ventured to intimate, have threads stretching far and wide – which is to say that we may observe similarities in, but also variations upon, themes and their development within and across cultures and even language groups. Thus the Irish tradition shows a complex development of interlocking themes – the Otherworld waters of knowledge, the ritual acquisition of supernatural knowledge from the thumb – which, in some respects, reaches a neat and ordered culmination in the tale of Finnéces, where Finn gains his poetic and mantic skills from sucking his thumb when cooking the salmon of wisdom from the Boyne, the source of what Dumézil termed "la gloire lumineuse",[94] an expression of potent Otherworld force. We may sometimes also infer cultural contact. Thus, narratives such as the Norse myths of Iðunn and Baldr have analogues in Finnish (the Sampo and Lemminkäinen) which suggest a shared or interacting narrative tradition. Yet it is striking that the theme of otherworldly poetic inspiration does not necessarily adhere across traditions to the tales with the strongest narrative connections, suggesting that the link between theme and narrative was subject to considerable variation. The same is implied in other apparently linked motifs like the thumb of knowledge between Irish and Norse tales, where the Irish links this with a long-standing tradition of mantic/poetic knowledge, whereas in Norse it is a one-off way to advance a particular narrative. The markedly different world views and focuses of thematic interest seen in the developments of a common narrative such as Iðunn/Sampo or Finn/Sigurðr should act as a warning against the assumption that geographically close cultures will simply borrow narratives from each other along with all the concomitant world view of the lender; it should also prompt us to seek out such common narratives and uncover the distinctive ways each culture develops themes within them.

Some instances of the use or adaptation of tradition to reflect the individual circumstances of poets, or of a particularly cultural context, have been mentioned, starting with Egill's exploitation of the deathly background to the myth of poetry wrenched, with huge effort, from the Otherworld to represent the despairing grief that makes poetry now all but impossible to compose, but that at the same time yields the means to compose a work deeply steeped in poetic craft. Egill de-identified himself

94 Dumézil 1924, p. 8.

from his erstwhile mentor, the warrior-poet god Óðinn, while at the same time demonstrating the poetic gift that he appeared to be rejecting.

Similarly in Finland-Karelia, with a few carefully chosen allusions, the Perttunens were able to appropriate some of the great myths of creation; in alluding to the Sampo, the bounteous furnisher of fecundity, and proclaiming that it did not lack words, the singer was declaring that he himself did not lack words to describe it or to perform his craft. The emphasis on the smith Ilmarinen's craft by Jeremie Malinen is likewise a reference to the singer's own skill, both as a poet and a smith. The poets thus made themselves, as singers, the peers of the heroes they sang of, and in turn made these heroes of whom they sang their colleagues – sages and singers like them. The hero becomes a metaphor for the poet. And the narrative of how the hero derives his knowledge from the Otherworld is itself a metaphor for how the poet exercises his craft by engaging with the Otherworlds evoked in the very composition of verse.

In Wales, *Preideu Annwfyn* may well have reflected a defence of the poetic skill of Taliesin, a persona representing all worthy traditional bards, which is achieved again by reference to a myth of the seizure of poetic craft from the Otherworld. More broadly, we have seen how the accounts of poets or poetry by writers such as Giraldus Cambrensis and Elis Gruffydd represent an adaptation of tradition to accord with the cultural expectations of the time and the intended audience.

Instances where it is possible to determine something of the specifics of compositional or performative context act as a reminder that many Norse myths in particular, including much of the myth of the salvaging of the mead of poetry from the Otherworld, have come down to us in depersonalised forms, yet at some point particular poets must have composed or performed them and then (on occasion) committed them to writing, and specific personal performative elements or concerns may still be hidden within these retold myths. The way that the general mythic elixir of immortality comes to be seen as a mead of poetry in Norse, for example, is surely a reflection of the concerns of those telling the myths, that is to say poets, who wished, like Arhippa Perttunen in Finland or, arguably, the poet of *Preideu Annwfyn* in Wales, to defend the value of their craft at the transitional and potentially threatening stage of textualisation.

The notion of seeking poetry from the Otherworld surely stems from the perception that poetry creates something new, evoking a world that is not actually present, and thus replicates the original act of world creation *ex nihilo*. The Otherworld is the world of non-existence – as may be implied in its Welsh name Annwfyn – yet the Otherworld invariably attracts to itself the symbolism of the world of the dead, even when it is not specifically equated with it. All of the traditions considered here, except perhaps the Greek *Hymn to Hermes*, show an intimate interweaving of motifs of death with the poetic Otherworld. The Gaelic bards in Scotland seem to have been initiated by means of a grave-like confinement, which induced the production of mantic poetry; the same has been inferred for Welsh traditions of Aneirin. Óðinn in Norse wrests poetry from the grave-like undermountain world of a giant, and in Finnish, Väinämöinen descends into the mouth of the dead seer Vipunen to secure the creative

words he needs. Interacting with the Otherworld is by definition a liminal act, one of crossing boundaries, and this is a motif that is emphasised to varying degrees in the different traditions, being particularly clear in the Irish.

A quest to the Otherworld had to have an object. The most basic form of traditional quest in Indo-European traditions appears to have been the cattle raid, cattle standing as a metonym for wealth or treasure, which then comes to act – in various realisations – as a concrete symbol of poetic inspiration. The cattle raid still formed the basis of the myth of gaining poetic skill in the Greek *Hymn to Hermes*, where its acquisition also marked the initiate's acceptance among the society of heroes (in the form of gods); Finnish-Karelian singers likewise equated themselves with the heroes of the songs they sang, asserting the worth of their work.

The object of the quest in many myths of poetic inspiration is the cauldron or its contents. In Celtic sources the cauldron, as a source of nourishment, develops into a fount of rebirth. Poetry too is nourished from it, but more specifically the imagery appears to relate to the cauldron as a symbol of death and annihilation, which may also be indicated in the poison that brews within it: poison is a material expression of the world of non-being whence poetry, as we have seen, springs. The cauldron or vat is a prominent symbol in Germanic myth too, where it is associated both with the liquor of immortality (implicit in Ægir's brewing in the giants' cauldron) and the mead of poetry (retrieved from the giants by Óðinn); at an earlier stage, it appears to have been associated with ritual sacrifice and mantic powers. The cauldron of rebirth also occurs in Norse in the form of Eldhrímnir, in which a boar is cooked anew each day for the warriors of Valhǫll (*Grímnismál*, st. 18; Snorri: *Gylfaginning*, ch. 38).[95] Celtic and Germanic traditions are clearly closely linked. Cauldrons do occur elsewhere: thus one shamanic initiation involved the shaman being cooked in a cauldron, from which he was reborn with new powers (text in Tolley 2009, II, no. 17, esp. the section "The smith under the mountain forges the shaman's body"), but the complex development into a source of poetic wisdom seems to be characteristic of the Celtic and Germanic worlds. In Finnish tradition, the cauldron is replaced with the Sampo, which is undefined but is generally more mill-like than vessel-like. It is nonetheless a source of fecundity – and of words: hence, an object whose fundamental purpose is for food provision again stands as a symbol for the profusion of poetic skill. The Sampo is not, however, associated with sacrifice, which appears to be a primarily Indo-European concern. In contrast, the hunt and its concomitant world view, expressed for example in bear-wake rites (with developed symbolisms of vertical and horizontal this-world–Otherworld axes, and hunters and bears passing into each others' Otherworlds), along with classic shamanism, which tends to be found alongside and as part of the hunting world view, play little part in Indo-European traditions

95 The correspondences between Irish and Norse traditions of the self-renewing boar are discussed by Egeler (2013, pp. 81–85).

(at least, as considered here) and scarcely interweave with the symbolism of poetic inspiration in the way they do, for example, in Finland. As noted, the Indo-European traditions instead manipulate the theme of the raid.[96]

The focus upon poetic inspiration as the object of the Otherworld quest highlights the importance of the poet or singer, who comes to be equated with the heroes who undertake the quest (and even with the inspiration itself). The knowledge gained is often characterised as mantic – almost by definition, what derives from the Otherworld lies outside the realm of the mundane. The perception of words as magically empowered is emphasised in Finnish, where the *tietäjä* was also a singer (of charms). This is apparent in Norse too, being implied for example in the *rúnar* that Óðinn grabs from the tree, but we have little reliable information about how magical practitioners worked in the pre-Christian period, to the extent that we cannot say how far anything comparable to the *tietäjä*, with his emphasis on the magical potency of words, existed in Scandinavia. In Celtic traditions, mantic and poetic abilities went hand in hand, at least in the mythic tradition if not in reality; Finn's skills are both mantic and poetic, as are Taliesin's, and Giraldus's *awenyddion*'s.

In Finnish poetic tradition in particular, the journey to the Otherworld becomes a metaphor for the act of composition itself. Something very similar has been argued for Welsh tradition as expressed in *Preideu Annwfyn*. In short, poetry is its own fulfilment. The object of the Otherworld quest is the poem that describes that very quest: hence the metaphor is self-referential and self-fulfilling. The source of poetic power is poetry itself, just as Óðinn makes himself the source of Otherworld knowledge by sacrificing himself on the tree, a myth which, among its various meanings, may hint at a similar awareness in Norse tradition to what is found in the Finnish, and arguably Welsh, that the acquisition of knowledge lies in its seeking.

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96 The theft of the Sampo in Finnish-Karelian tradition does, of course, also constitute a raid; this is possibly, though not necessarily, a reflection of interchange of traditions with Indo-European peoples over long periods of prehistory.

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The Question of Irish Analogues in Old Norse-Icelandic Voyage Tales in the *fornaldarsögur* and the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus

Abstract: Over the years, scholars have found both linguistic items and literary motifs in the Old Norse-Icelandic traditions which, they argue, have been, or may have been borrowed from Gaelic and Insular Celtic. This study re-examines the suggested influence of Medieval Irish voyage literature on aspects of Old Norse-Icelandic saga and myth. The work falls into two main parts. The first part presents a brief summary of the Irish material; the second, an analysis and discussion of some of the relevant Icelandic *fornaldarsögur* or Legendary Sagas, in which Thor or his namesake is the main character, together with related material from Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*. The Irish and Icelandic materials are compared and contrasted with a view to determining possible influence. A number of motifs in the Thorkillus voyages of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* are then discussed along with analogues from the Irish and classical traditions, many of which, to my knowledge, have not previously figured in the scholarly literature. Finally, following a short discussion of material relating to Hvítramannaland and an assessment of the possible influence of Irish/Hiberno-Latin visionary literature on the Old Norse-Icelandic tales, some general conclusions on the subject as a whole are presented.

1. Introduction – 2. Medieval Irish/Hiberno-Latin Voyage Literature, 2.1 Peregrinatio: *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*, 2.2 Irish *Immrama* and *Echtrai* – 3. Old Norse *fornaldarsögur* and the Irish Texts, 3.1 *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns*, 3.1.1 Analysis of First Part of *Þorsteins þáttr*, 3.1.2 Hadingus and Nera, 3.1.3 Analysis of Second Part of *Þorsteins þáttr*, 3.1.4 Conclusion on First and Second Parts of *Þorsteins þáttr*, 3.1.5 Discussion of Third Part *of Þorsteins þáttr* and the Old Norse-Icelandic Analogues, 3.2 Thor's Visit to Útgarða-Lok, 3.3 Talking Heads and Wells of Knowledge – 4. The Voyages of Thorkillus in *Gesta Danorum* – 5. Irish/Hiberno-Latin and Classical Parallels, 5.1 Three Boats Covered in Ox-hides, 5.2 The House Full of Treasures, 5.3 The Precipitous Island: Theft, Loss of Companions and Supernumeraries, 5.4 The Tripartite Nature of Truth, 5.5 Beautiful Women: Caught in a Trap, 5.6 The Guardian, the River and the Bridge, 5.7 The Pierced Geruthus and Chained Utgarthilocus, 5.8 Monstrous Guard Dogs – 6. The Christian Elements, 6.1 Eiríks saga víðfǫrla, 6.2 Hvítramannaland – 7. Conclusion

1 Introduction

By the end of the ninth century and beginning of the tenth, Norse Vikings had married women of Gaelic descent and taken many Gaelic female slaves captive during the period of their raids and colonisation of Ireland and Scotland, so that a mixed Gaelic-Norse population had developed in parts of these countries. *Landnámabók*

documents a number of people of Gaelic origin, especially Gaelic slaves and people of Gaelic-Norse descent, who settled in Iceland during the Age of Settlement, particularly in the Breiðafjörðr peninsula and north of Reykjavík, many of whom came from Ireland and the Hebrides.[1] It seems reasonable to assume that this mixed Norse-Gaelic people would have acted as channels of communication and mediation, transmitting various linguistic and literary items into Old Norse culture. Similarly, those Norse people who had spent time in Ireland and Gaelic Scotland, and subsequently settled in Iceland, would have also contributed to this process.

We begin this study on the possible influence of Medieval Irish voyage literature on Old Norse-Icelandic with a short summary of the nature and content of the Irish material.

2 Medieval Irish/Hiberno-Latin voyage literature

2.1 Peregrinatio: *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*

The Irish Church was renowned in early medieval Europe for the practice of *peregrinatio*, which entailed going away from the home place and into exile (Hughes 1959; Charles-Edwards 1976); it normally took the form of renouncing the world and going in search of secluded places in which the *peregrinus* could lead a life of prayer and penitence. For the love of God, the *peregrinus*, entered into self-imposed exile, leaving home in search of a deserted place – a stranger to his home and a stranger to his new location, a person between worlds.

The literary reflexes of this eremitic activity are expressed in literary form in Hiberno-Latin texts, such as *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis*, 'The Voyage of Saint Brendan' (Selmer [ed.] 1959), and in a genre in Early Irish called *immrama* ('Sea-Voyages'). The precursors of the *immrama* are found in short narratives contained in the Lives of the Saints about sinners being sent adrift in open boats (Byrne 1932), and in voyage episodes in these Lives which tell of clerics voyaging to either one specific island or to a series of islands; in most extant Lives, the saint's voyage(s)/journey(s) are a staple element. Adomnán's seventh-century *Vita Columbae* reports on many voyages and adventures between Hebridean and other islands and between the Hebrides and Ireland, referring in particular to the voyages of Baitán and Cormac, both of whom sought deserts in the ocean.[2] Adomnán tells that Cormac ua Lethain attempted three times to find such an island but failed on each occasion. On one occasion, he got as far as the Orkney Islands. On another, his voyage failed because he had taken with him a monk who had not received the consent of his abbot. Cormac's

1 For genetic evidence of Gaelic presence in Iceland, see Agnar Helgason et al. 2000.
2 Anderson / Anderson (eds./transl.) 1961, I.6, II.42; see I.20 on Baitán = Baitanus nepos niath Taloirc.

third voyage took him as far as the very periphery of the known world. Mention is also made of voyages by Irish pilgrim saints in an early document known as the *Litany of Irish Pilgrim Saints* which appears to date to between AD 800 and 900 (Hughes 1959; Sanderlin 1975). It refers to many seafaring saints, a number of whom, such as Saint Brendan and the Uí Chorra, are the subject of voyage tales in their own right. The practice of *peregrinatio*, and the Irish tales containing the theme, were inspired by the example of the Desert Fathers who retreated into the wilderness, especially Saint Anthony and Saint Paul, and the texts of their lives, the *Vita Antonii* (Bertrand [ed.] 2006) and the *Vita Pauli primi eremitae* by Saint Jerome (Migne [ed.] 1883), both of which had a strong influence on this literary genre.

The *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* was a best-seller in the Middle Ages. It was translated into many vernacular languages – including Norwegian/Old Norse, probably in the thirteenth century.[3] Brendan's quest for the Promised Land in the *Navigatio Brendani* takes the form of a voyage lasting seven years.[4] The plot of the tale is constructed around the initiatory rites of the Church, beginning with a journey lasting throughout the forty days spent by Christ in the wilderness, Moses' period of forty days on the mountaintop, and the forty years journey in the desert, before reaching the Promised Land of the Saints.[5] During this period, the initiate is sorely tested – as were Christ and Moses – by the raging tempests of the sea, and by hunger and thirst, and the fear of wild exotic creatures. The soul must endure great hardship before emerging into the light and wisdom of the Promised Land. The tale has been variously dated by scholars, ranging from the eighth to the tenth century.[6] Here is a short summary:[7]

A visiting father, Barinthus (Barrind), comes to Brendan's monastery and tells the saint of a voyage he and Abbot Mernóc made to the latter's secluded island, *Insula Deliciosa*, 'Island of Delights', located off the coast of County Donegal in the north of Ireland. From there, they voyaged through a thick fog, to the *terra reprommisionis sanctorum*, a land in which a great light shone perpetually and that was full of flowers, fruit-bearing

3 See Barron / Burgess (eds.) 2002; Unger (ed.) 1877, I, pp. 272–275 for the Norse version.

4 *Vita Brendani/Betha Brénainn* ('The Life of Brendan') recounts two voyages made by the saint to find a *terra secreta*, one lasting five years, the other two years. He was inspired, as was St Columba when he went into exile on the Island of Iona, by the words of Scripture (Gen. 12.1 and Lk. 18.29–30) that he who wishes to find eternal life must leave his parents and his own country. Brendan climbs a mountain and sees a beautiful island, which is promised to him: *sicut Israelitico terram pollictus sum populo et adiutor affui ut ad eam pertigeret, ita tibi insulam quam vidisti promitto, et opera complebo.* Compare the vision given to Moses from the top of Mount Nebo of the promised land of Canaan (Deuteronomy 34:1–3), the source of which is God's word or promise to Abraham (Gen. 15.18–21). See Plummer (ed.) 1910, xii.104; Kenney (ed.) 1929, pp. 412 ff.; Mac Mathúna 1994, pp. 318 ff.; Burgess / Strijbosch (eds.) 2000, pp. 3–12. On the Irish Life, see Mac Mathúna 2006.

5 Mac Mathúna 1994; see also Orlandi 2006; O'Loughlin 1997; Strijbosch 2000; Wooding (ed.) 2000a; Wooding 2000b; Bray (2000 [1995]); Strijbosch 2000; Egeler 2015.

6 See Mac Mathúna 1994, pp. 315 ff.

7 See Wooding (ed.) 2000a.

trees and precious stones. It appeared they had been on the island for fifteen days but it had in fact been a full year, during which time they had not tasted food or drink. They found a river in the middle of the island, and while they were considering whether to cross it or not, a man appeared in a great light, who called them by their names and informed them that the Lord had revealed to them the land which had been set aside for his saints. The man said that they were not permitted to cross the river.

On hearing this story, Brendan is determined to go in search of the island and, having built a light wooden boat covered with ox-hides, sets off on his journey. The adventures of the voyagers are structured around the celebration of the Christian feasts of the monastic year. They see many great wonders in the ocean and visit many islands before they finally reach their destination and return home.

The reflexes of *peregrinatio* are also recorded in visionary literature (*físi* in Irish, from Latin *visio*), in which there are descriptions of both the heavenly aspects of the next world and the punishments and pains inflicted on sinners: a chosen soul is brought into the next world in a vision to learn about it and to bring back the news to this world so that people may improve their Christian lives.[8]

2.2 Irish *immrama* and *echtrai*

Many of the islands and motifs in the *Navigatio* have parallels in vernacular Irish voyage tales, called *immrama*.[9] Structurally, like the *Navigatio*, they are framework tales in which the voyaging from island to island is the centerpiece.[10] This allows for adventures of various kinds to take place and be narrated. The authors have drawn on traditional stories and folklore motifs, biblical, apocryphal and visionary accounts of the next world, Classical literature, tales of actual voyages, and their own imagi-

8 For lists of these tales, see Mac Cana 1980, pp. 48, 58. As he states (p. 76), this cannot be a traditional notation for a category of tales. For more information on the genre of visions in the medieval Irish tradition, Carey et al. 2014.

9 See Oskamp (ed./transl.) 1970, pp. 60 ff. and Mac Mathúna 1996 for more details and discussion.

10 *Immram* ('sea-voyage') is a verbal noun of *imm-rá* ('rows around, navigates'). According to Mac Cana (1980, p. 76), the *im(m)ram* group of tales in the medieval tale lists is an innovation. The main extant *immrama* tales are: 1) *Immram Brain maic Febail* ('The Voyage of Bran', Mac Mathúna [ed.] 1985). This tale is listed as an *Echtra* in List B of the tale lists and is absent from List A. Mac Cana (1980, p. 70) thought it possible that it dropped out of the list because of uncertain demarcation between the two genres; 2) *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin* ('The Voyage of Máel Dúin', Oskamp [ed./transl.] 1970); Mac Cana (1980, p. 93) suggests that the other *immrama* in List A may have assembled around this relatively earlier tale; 3) *Immram Curaig Ua Corra* ('The Voyage of the Uí Chorra', Stokes [ed.] 1893); 4) *Immram Snédgusa ocus Maic Riagla* ('The Voyage of Snédgus and Mac Riagla', Stokes [ed.] 1888/89), which is absent from the tale lists. Absolute dating of the texts is difficult: the Bran tale may date to the late seventh or early eighth century; Máel Dúin's tale to the ninth century; the poetry of Snédgus and Mac Riagla to the tenth century; and the Uí Chorra tale probably to the twelfth century, although there was probably an earlier lost tale.

nation and fantasy. Besides being vehicles for entertainment, in which the fantastic and supernatural play leading roles, these tales have, essentially, a didactic function as journeys of repentance in the quest for Christian regeneration and transformation, conversion and salvation.[11]

The *immrama* differ from the *Navigatio Brendani* in that the protagonists are mainly secular people. However, the tales have a clear Christian message. *Immram Brain*, for example, tells that the regal hero Bran was visited by an Otherworld woman who invited him to go on a voyage to her island home of *Tír na mBan* 'The Land of (the) Women'. During her description of her home and surrounding islands, she fortells the birth of Christ, who will come into the world and cleanse the human race of their sins. The tale also draws a comparison between the begetting by Mannanán mac Lir, the sea-god, of his son Mongán mac Fiachnai, and the Incarnation of Jesus. As regards Máel Dúin, he is the son of a nun who was raped by a raiding warrior. He is brought up by a local queen and when his father is later killed by marauders and pirates, Máel Dúin is taunted by locals to seek vengeance: he decides to build a boat in order to seek out the perpetrators who have gone onto the ocean. During the course of his voyage, he renounces vengeance and makes peace with the perpetrators who repent of their sin and seek forgiveness.

The tales have also to do with exploring the mysteries of the universe and contain many visionary elements. This is true in particular of *Immram Curaig Ua Corra*. The Uí Chorra brothers are born as a result of a pact with the Devil and therefore feel obliged to do the evil work of Satan: they become brigands and destroy churches. Following a vision of hell granted to the eldest brother, they repent and rebuild the churches they have destroyed. Looking out at sea one winter's day, they wonder where the sun rises and sets and how it is that there is no ice on the sea when there is ice on all the inland waters: they decide to explore the vast ocean to see its wonders, because it is on the sea each person goes on pilgrimage. At sea, they visit many islands and encounter vile and horrible sights of torments and punishments being inflicted on those who have sinned in this life and not repented. Here, the sea is a place of purgation and purification for those who have repented, such as the hermits who live bare lives of seclusion, poverty and prayer. For those who have not repented, it is an inferno in which they undergo terrible punishments for their sins.

The traditional elements in the *Navigatio* and *immrama* are reminiscent of another type of tale called *echtrae* (Expedition, Adventure, lit. 'Outing', from **ekster* = 'outside'), which involve journeys to the Otherworld.[12] *Echtrae*-type tales share a

11 See further on these tales: Oskamp (ed./transl.) 1970; Dumville 1976; Hillers 1993; Mac Mathúna 1994; Clancy 2000; Wooding (ed.) 2000a.

12 There are many more *echtrai* listed in the tale lists than *immrama*, but only three narratives are common to both lists; in his 1980 work, Mac Cana takes the *immrama* to be a later genre than the *echtrai*, proposing that it was derived from the *echtrai* (Mac Cana 1980, pp. 45, 53, 75 ff., 93). Some of the tales listed are no longer extant or are duplicates of other texts. The extant ones include *Echtra*

number of features with the *immrama*, and although it is difficult to make a sharp distinction between the two, the medieval classification is not without foundation.[13] As expected, there is interaction and overlap between the two genres, as there is between them and the other tale types in the literary corpus of medieval Irish texts.[14] The structure and motifs of the *echtrai* adhere for the most part to a narrative pattern which has as its central theme the journey of a man to the Otherworld: in most stories an otherworld visitor invites a hero with regal connections to her/his home; he makes a boat journey to this other world and spends some time there. During his stay there, the man sees and enjoys the wonderful pleasures and treasures of the other domain, often defeats an enemy and/or monster, and usually has a liaison with an Otherworld woman, who may have invited him there in the first place. He often returns to this world, bringing back gifts, treasures and insignia; he sometimes goes back again to the Otherworld or remains there and is never heard of again. These tales have essentially to do with the legitimatisation of earthly kingship by the otherworld powers.[15]

Chonnlai ('The Journey/Adventure of Connlae', McCone [ed.] 2000), *Echtra Nera* ('The Journey/Adventure of Nera', Meyer [ed./transl.] 1889), *Echtra Fergussa maic Leti* ('The Journey/Adventure of Fergus mac Leti', Binchy [ed./transl.] 1952), *Scél na Fírflatha/Echtra Cormaic i dTír Tairngire* ('The Journey/Adventure of Cormac in the Land of Promise', Stokes [ed./transl.] 1891), *Echtra Airt meic Cuinn* ('The Adventure of Art, son of Conn', Best 1903), *Echtra Laegairi maic Crimthainn* ('The Journey/Adventure of Laegaire mac Crimthainn', Jackson [ed./transl.] 1942; and *Echtra Thaidg mheic Chéin* ('The Journey/Adventure of Tadhg mac Céin', O'Grady [ed./transl.] 1892). The last two do not appear in either of the lists. This is understandable in the case of *Echtra Thaidg* as this is a late work, but *Echtra Laegairi* has been dated to the ninth/tenth century by its editor (Jackson [ed./transl.] 1942, pp. 377 ff.). We may also add the tale about Cú Chulainn's voyage and sojourn in the Otherworld known as *Serglige Con Culainn* ('The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn', Dillon [ed.] 1953); *Echtra Con Culaind* of the tale lists may be related to either Recension B of the *Serglige* or be a doublet of part or whole of the tale *Tochmarc Emere* 'The Wooing of Emer' (see Mac Cana 1980, p. 93 and discussion of *Serglige Con Culainn* below). A tale such as *Echtra Crimthainn Nia Náir* ('The Adventure of Crimthainn Nia Náir'), which is mentioned in both lists, is now lost but can be partly pieced together from other sources (see Borsje 2012, pp. 153–191). The tales vary in date, *Echtrae Chonnlai* being probably the earliest, generally dated to either the late seventh or early eighth century by scholars (McCone [ed.] 2000).

13 See Dumville 1976. There is frequently overlap in the content of the tales listed in the tale lists, resulting in them being sometimes attributed to different genres. Probable *echtra[e]* features which led *Immram Brain* to be classified as an *echtra[e]* in one of the tale lists (see note 10 above) include: his regal status; his meeting with a beautiful woman and the invitation from her to visit her Otherworld home; the fruited branch from the island of apple trees; the Land of the Women (also in *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin* §28); elements in the description of the Otherworld, such as the absence of wounding and death; the sea as a land full of people going about their everyday business, tending animals and planting corn; the passage of time being different there than in this world ('it seemed to them they had been there for a year; in fact, it was many years', *Immram Brain* §62). This latter feature is also found in other forms of ecclesiastical literature, such as *Navigatio* §1. See the discussion of the voyages of Thorkillus in *Gesta Danorum* below for further comment on these and other narrative elements.

14 The same is also true of the medieval Icelandic literary system; see Torfi H. Tulinius 2000 and note 20 below for further references.

15 See Mac Mathúna 1985, pp. 248–249, Duignan 2011.

Serglige Con Culainn, 'The Wasting (or Love) Sickness of Cú Chulainn', contains a number of the main elements of the *echtrai*.[16] It appears that there were two different recensions of the tale, called A and B, and that the existing tale is a compilation of the eleventh century based on ninth-century material. Here is a short summary based on B:[17]

Cú Chulainn was at Mag Muirtheimne at the festival of *Samain* when two beautiful birds alighted on the lough. Having failed to shoot the birds down, he was depressed and went to sleep with his back against a pillar stone. Two women appeared and beat him with horsewhips until he was nearly dead. He was then in a wasting sickness, from which he regained consciousness, but remained speechless and without strength for a year. He was then visited by a man who said that the two women who attacked him were Lí Ban and Fand. Cú Chulainn then went to meet Lí Ban who told him that he would be healed and have Fand as his lover if he assisted them in their battle against an Otherworld enemy. Cú Chulainn went to the Otherworld, where he defeated the enemies of the women and stayed with Fand for a month. He then returned to his own wife, Emer, but was lovesick and distraught: he was given a drink of forgetfulness, and Manannán, the Otherworld husband of Fand, shook his cloak between the lovers to keep them apart forever after.[18]

16 See note 12 above.

17 The A recension dates roughly to the eleventh century, B to the ninth century (see Dillon 1953).

18 For a discussion and analysis of the tale, see Carey 1999b; Findon 1997; Egeler 2015, pp. 324–335; Toner 2016, pp. 135–166. There are similarities between the Otherworld women here and the *seiðkonur* of Norse saga literature. In the story of Vanlandi and Drífa in *Ynglinga saga* (Finnur Jónsson [ed.] 1893–1911, pp. 11–12), for example, the king failed to keep his promise to return to his paramour Drífa in the land of the Finnar; she then engaged a *seiðkona* to either lure him back to her, or, failing that, to kill him: the *seiðkona* was subsequently implicitly responsible for the death of Vanlandi; he fell asleep but awoke after a while, saying that he had been attacked by a *mara*. He later died, having been trodden to death. These tales depict Otherworld-type women capable of magically inflicting sickness and altered states of mind on mortal men who transgress acceptable social boundaries. A similar situation occurs in the tales of Muirchertach mac Erca and Haraldr Hárfagri as related in *Aided Muirchertaig meic Erca* and *Ágrip af Nóregskonungasǫgum* (Driscoll [ed./transl.] 1995, ch. 2–3) respectively. In both tales, the kings fall madly in love with strange exotic Otherworld-type women, Sín and Snjófríðr, who use magic and enchantment to cause them harm, driving both to losing their minds, and Muirchertach to a three-fold death (see Matheson [2015] on the theme of madness and deception in the Irish and Norse-Icelandic traditions). While this theme of magical means of seduction occurs in a wider west European context, the tales need to be examined closely to determine if some of the similarities may be partly due to Hiberno-Norse literary contacts. With regard to Cú Chulainn being beaten and left seriously ill, Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1957, p. 17) refers to a parallel in the fourteenth-century Icelandic tale *Ála flekks saga*, which, he claims, contains other Celtic motifs (Lagerholm [ed.] 1927, p. lxv; Glauser 1993, pp. 6–7). Jan Erik Rekdal sees parallels between the legend of Saint Sunniva and Irish voyage tales as reflecting close contact between western Norway and the Bristish Isles during the Viking period. See also Chadwick 1953–1957; Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1957, pp. 16–19; Chesnutt 1968; Almqvist 1978–1981; for a recent discussion of *Serglige Con Culainn* in this regard, see Hall 2004, pp. 136 ff.

In *Echtra Laegairi*, an Otherworld king, Fiachna mac Rétach, comes to the land of mortals seeking assistance against his enemies from Laegaire mac Crimthainn of Connacht.[19] Fíachna's wife had been abducted by his enemy and, despite having won one battle over his adversary, he could not defeat him entirely, nor win back his wife on his own. Like the Otherworld people in *Serglige Con Culainn*, he needed the assistance of the men of this world. Laegaire goes to the Otherworld and defeats Fiachna's enemies, rescues his wife, and wins Fiachna's daughter as his own wife. He returns after a year to Connacht but goes back to the Otherworld to rule alongside Fiachna.

3 Old Norse *fornaldarsögur* and the Irish texts

A number of *fornaldarsögur* concerning journeys to the Otherworld invite comparison with the Irish material, and just as there is difficulty in delineating the boundaries between *immrama* and *echtrai*, so too are there problems in defining what constitutes the *fornaldarsögur* as a group.[20] Unlike the Irish types, which are categorised and listed in medieval tale lists, the grouping of the Icelandic sagas belongs to the modern period, based on collections such as that of Rafn ([ed.] 1829–1830). The tales belong mostly to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but in some instances can be dated to an earlier period. Mitchell (1993) writes that they may be defined by the key concepts of continuity and traditionality, but belong to what he calls "an acquisitive and eclectic genre" (p. 207). In this regard, they are similar to the *immrama*, which was a new genre that developed as a literary response to, and representation of, the practice of *peregrinatio*, and used in its composition the range of materials outlined in our discussion above.

Some years ago, Rosemary Power (1985a) presented a substantial scholarly study and analysis of some *fornaldarsögur*, or related-type tales, and the possible Irish influence on them.[21] She concentrated on *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns*, *Helga þáttr Þórisso-*

19 See Jackson (ed./transl.) 1942.

20 On these tales, including studies which seek to define them as a genre, see, for example, Schier 1970; Hermann Pálsson / Edwards 1971; Power 1984a; Power 1985a; Hermann Pálsson 1985; Bandle 1988; Harris 1989; Mitchell 1991; Mitchell 1993; Vésteinn Ólason 1994; Driscoll 2003; Ármann Jakobsson et al. (eds.) 2003; Torfi H. Tulinius 2000; Rowe / Harris 2005; Torfi H. Tulinius 2005; Phelpstead 2009; Ney et al. 2009; Shafer 2010; Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2014; Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2015; Egeler 2015.

21 See also Power 1984b; O'Connor 2000; Egeler 2015. Stories of the 'lustful stepmother' are not studied in any detail in the present work. Some of these have voyage elements contained in bridal-quest or exile-and-return romances and are quite widespread in both the Icelandic and Irish traditions. The Icelandic *Hjálmþérs saga ok Ǫlvis*, which probably dates to the fifteenth century, and *Hjálmþérsrímur*, early fifteenth century, have close correspondences with the Irish tales *Fingal Rónáin* ('The kin-slaying by Rónán', probably tenth century), the Early Modern Irish romances *Eachtra Airt meic Cuind* ('The Adventure of Art son of Conn', probably dating to between the twelfth to fourteenth centuries) and

nar and *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla*, comparing them with the common theme in Early Irish literature of a human hero who makes a journey to the Otherworld to resolve a dispute there;[22] her conclusion was that it is very likely, given the early date of the Irish tales (early Viking Age, possibly earlier in some cases), that such types were transmitted orally to Iceland during the period of settlement in the late eighth and ninth centuries

> [...] where they were combined with the mythological tale of the visit of Thor to Geirröth and perhaps with other similar mythological tales. By the end of the twelfth century some pattern had emerged in the theme and structure, which is best exemplified by the main tale in *Thorstein's saga* (Power 1985a, p. 169).

The thesis is, then, that there has been an amalgam of an indigenous tale of a journey to the Otherworld of Geirrøðr with similar but not identical Irish tales of Otherworld journeys.

Power shares the view of a number of other scholars who have dealt with the subject of literary contacts between the Old Norse and Gaelic worlds – that the means

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Stair Nuadat Find Femin ('The Story of Nuadu Find Femin'), which is contained in a fifteenth-century manuscript (see Poppe 1997). Although *Fingal Rónáin* and *Hjálmþérs saga* are far removed in time from one another and have different cultural-historical contexts, O'Connor (2000) finds that they have more similarities with one another than with any other of the many extant lustful stepmother tales. He proceeds cautiously, however, with regard to possible influence of the Irish tale on *Hjálmþérs saga*, arguing that even though the literary evidence suggests a close relationship between the two, and that the parallels "place the burden of proof upon the 'Celtoskeptic' rather than the 'Celtophile'" (p. 36), a comparative analysis of the texts need not depend on influence at all, but may only involve literary analysis. The question of the possible influence of *Eachtra Airt* on the Icelandic tale and other Icelandic *fornaldarsögur*, whether this influence be of a direct or indirect nature, requires further study. O'Connor (pp. 31–32) concludes that *Eachtra Airt* cannot have been the source of the lustful stepmother story in *Hjálmþérs saga*, but that it is not improbable that it "and/or related texts prompted the Icelandic development of the bridal quest álög motif". See also Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1957, pp. 19–20; Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1975a; Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1975b; Power 2006.

22 Power 1985a, p. 167; Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1932, pp. 114–115; Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1957, pp. 16–19. Power also examined the tales *Yngvars saga víðfǫrla*, *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs* and some other works, including the voyages of Thorkillus in *Gesta Danorum* (VIII.xiv.1–20) by Saxo Grammaticus. Scholars have had difficulty in categorising *Yngvars saga víðfǫrla*, as it contains elements which are found not only in the *fornaldarsögur* but also in kings' sagas and hagiography (see Mitchell 1993; Phelpstead 2009). According to Mitchell, *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla* is based on foreign sources and should not therefore be categorized as a *fornaldarsaga*; nor, in his view, can *Helga þáttr Þórissonar* be so classified, since its closest structural and thematic parallels are saints' legends and local legends. Rowe / Harris (2005, pp. 452–478) are of a similar view. *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla* and *Helga þáttr Þórissonar* have been chosen in this study because they have the Otherworld journey theme and some correspondences with the texts relating to Thor, including the voyages of Thorkillus in *Gesta Danorum*. *Hervarar saga*, which is earlier than the other two tales, also figures in the present work. See Tietz (ed./transl.) 2012 for a discussion of many of these tales; Egeler (2015) examines the tales under discussion here and also *Norna-Gests þáttr*, *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar, Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, and *Samsons saga fagra*.

of transmission into Icelandic was in the oral mode during the Age of Settlement.[23] Essentially, they argue, or imply, that Gaelic elements were preserved orally until they eventually emerged in written form some centuries later, in, for example, the *fornaldarsögur* and other works. However, in a 2005 contribution, in which she examines the possibility of transmission after the settlement through the Western Isles,[24] Power takes the view that the jury is still out on the matter of the nature and extent of the transmission process:

> Some particular stories and linguistic similarities have been examined in recent years, but the extent to which Gaelic material, whether factual or fictional, entered Iceland orally is still under consideration [...] It is assumed that any Gaelic cultural element had time in the following centuries, first pagan then Christian, to circulate and take on specifically Icelandic forms within the dominant culture. Certain stories are then thought to have surfaced in these new forms in the writings of the thirteenth and later centuries and in oral tradition collected mainly since the mid-nineteenth century (Power 2005, pp. 6–7).

The remainder of the paper will be concerned in great part with reconsidering this matter.

3.1 Þorsteins *þáttr bæjarmagns*

Fornaldarsögur are mostly concerned with the deeds and adventures of legendary heroes prior to the Age of Settlement of Iceland in far away Viking lands to the east. Mitchell (1993, p. 206) notes that some scholars have divided them into "Adventure Tales" and "Heroic Tales". Hermann Pálsson (1985), for example, takes the former to be close to folktales, with happy endings to quests by the hero in search of a wife or a kingdom, while 'Heroic Tales' are usually tragic. Unusually for a *fornaldarsaga*, the events related in *Þorsteins þáttr*, which may at a stretch be classified as an 'Adventure Tale', take place during the historical reigns of Earl Hákon Sigurðsson and King Óláfr Tryggvason, hence

23 See, for example, Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1957, pp. 23–24; Gísli Sigurðsson 1988, pp. 48–49. O'Connor (2000, pp. 15 ff.) suggests that this hypothesis can be applied to the transmission from Ireland to Iceland of simple motifs and story-patterns but considers it to be of little use when applied to the analysis of specific texts, especially to parallels in the texts he was dealing with which "encompass structural and technical subtleties of a thoroughly literary kind" (p. 17).

24 She concludes that transmission of fiction from Ireland and the Western Isles to Iceland did not occur during the medieval period: "Where Gaelic influence can be discerned, it was almost certainly transmitted during the Viking Age, and the elements were then adopted by the dominant culture. During the medieval period direct contact between Iceland and Ireland was, it appears, minimal, and any stories that passed at this stage might be expected to be attributed to their country of origin, as part of the material that composed the wonder literature and travelers tales popular throughout the Middle Ages. It is also likely that stories of this kind would be found in orally transmitted forms, such as ballads, in other parts of the northern world" (Power 2005, pp. 57–58). See also Shaw 2008; Egeler 2015.

identifying "the realm of the supernatural as chronologically contemporary with but geographically distinct from Christian Scandinavia".[25] The tale is generally designated as a *þáttr*, a short prose narrative, and is contained in 54 manuscripts, the earliest of which, AM 343 a 4to, belongs to the second half of the fifteenth century.[26]

A short prologue introduces the main character, namely, Þorsteinn, a man of extraordinary size and unfriendly disposition, who becomes a retainer of King Óláfr Tryggvason. The king thinks highly of him and sends him on dangerous missions. Following the prologue, the text may be divided into three parts: 1) Þorsteinn's visit to, and adventure in the Underworld; 2) His rescue of a dwarf's son and his acquisition of magic gifts; 3) His journey to the Otherworld of Glæsisvellir and the defeat of King Goðmundr's enemy by means of the magic gifts obtained in 2). The second and third parts are logically and narratively linked and could be treated as constituting two sections of the same part. After the first part, Þorsteinn returns to King Óláfr before he embarks on the second adventure which encompasses 2) and 3).

3.1.1 Analysis of first part of *Þorsteins þáttr*

The first part of the tale presents an adventure by the hero in a magical world similar to that of the third part and provides a foretaste for what is to come. Narratively, it is only loosely connected with the second and third parts. It has, however, some parallels which it shares with the remainder of the tale. For example, there is reference to wonderful treasures in all three parts – the gold ring and the tablecloth with precious stones in the Underworld of 1); the dwarf's magical gifts in 2); Agði's horns and *Grímr hinn góði* in 3). Þorsteinn steals the treasures from the Underworld and also Agði's horns from the realm of Geirrøðr. Unlike the three magic gifts obtained from the dwarf in 2), and used so effectively in 3), the treasures in the first part do not appear again. There is also the motif of invisibility: when he has the magic staff, Þorsteinn is invisible to the people of the Underworld, which enables him to steal the treasures; in 3), the dwarf's gifts also confer on him the gift of invisibility, permitting him to assist his companions and himself to win the contests in Geirrøðr's hall. The kingdom of Geirrøðr, like the Underworld, is reached by means of crossing a river, which is like wading through smoke.[27]

25 Rowe / Harris 2005, p. 472.

26 Tietz (ed./transl.) 2012, pp. 21–27; Driscoll / Hufnagel: *Stories for all Time: The Icelandic Fornaldarsögur*. *Fornaldarsögur norðurlanda*: A bibliography of manuscripts, editions, translations and secondary literature, at www.fasnl.ku.dk/bibl.aspx. Accessed 6.1.2017. For discussion of the tale, see, for example, Martin 1990 (structural-semiotic analysis); Tietz (ed./transl.) 2012; Egeler 2015, pp. 73–83.

27 Smoke/fog/rivers/cliffs and large boulders mark boundaries between this world and various Otherworlds in the tale. In the river ordeal in 3), Þorsteinn requires the aid of the *krókstafr* ('crook') to

3.1.2 Hadingus and Nera

The initial situation at the fairy mound, and some of the other elements, are reminiscent of part of the Hadingus episode in *Gesta Danorum* (I.8.14), which features an Otherworld journey.[28] While King Hadingus was at dinner one winter's day, a woman bearing summer stalks of hemlock lifted her head from under the ground beside the brazier and enquired if anyone knew where such plants could be found in winter. The king was curious about the matter, so she wrapped him under her mantle and vanished with him beneath the earth. They went through a smoky vale of darkness, then along a path worn away by travellers. They saw people in rich robes and nobles dressed in purple and afterwards came to a sunny region where the hemlock which the woman had brought with her was growing. They then reached a river flowing swiftly with weapons of various kinds in it, and crossed a bridge, at the other side of which they found men who had died by the sword and were now engaged in an everlasting display of their destruction.

Saxo mostly uses Old Norse-Icelandic sources concerning Hel in his description of the realm of the dead, but there are also Christian and Classical elements in the account. The remarkable portent of the Otherworld female guide appearing to Hadingus is reminiscent of Christian visionary literature, as are, to a degree, a number of other features, such as the guide, the mist, the river and the bridge.[29] However, the emphasis here is not on the horrors and torments which sinners must suffer, as it is in many visionary texts.

The Hadingus episode has some correspondences with the Irish tale of *Echtra Nera*, 'The Adventure of Nera' (Meyer [ed./transl.] 1889), which in its present form probably dates to the tenth or eleventh century but may be based on earlier material.

Similarities with the Hadingus episode include: the initial situation of descent to the Underworld by the mortal hero; the presence of a woman of that world who is his guide (and possibly his wife); the phantom armies; the difference in time between the world of men and the Underworld; the fruits of summer constituting proof of the existence of the other domain and of having sojourned in it. Regarding the

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get to the other side, just as the magic staff, the *Gríðarvǫlr*, given to him by the giantess Gríðr in the *Skáldskaparmál* version, is used to cross the river in *Þórsdrápa*.

28 Power (1985a, p. 169) points out that the first part resembles the international legend 'The Ride with the Fairies', and also "certain Icelandic folktales in which a human journeys to the underworld through a cleft in rock, usually in order to follow a supernatural character. He is invisible when he is there, and takes some object in order to prove where he has been."

29 In both Saxo and the Icelandic stories, the river functions as a boundary, which is also true of the river in Hermóðr's journey to Hel in *Gylfaginning*, ch. 49 (Faulkes [ed] 2005, p. 47). In the latter, the hero also passes through overcast areas before coming to the river Gjǫll and the bridge. Features in this episode which have been influenced by Classical literature include the nobles dressed in purple; the bridge of Gjǫll was probably influenced by Christian visionary literature, see Dinzelbacher 1973, p. 88.

Underworld, Saxo's tale no doubt deals with a journey to Hel; in the Irish tale, despite the usual focus in the *echtrai* on a land of beauty, pleasure and deathlessness, the land described here may also partly reflect the land of the dead. In the early story of *Cath Maige Mucrama* ('The Battle of Mag Muccrama'), the cave of Crúachain is called Ireland's gateway to hell (*dorus iffirn na Hérend*), from which hideous supernatural beasts and other unnatural creatures emerged (O Daly [ed.] 1975, pp. 48–49). As Toner (2013, p. 111) surmises: "As an entrance to hell, it would have been quite normal for deceased mortals to follow that path and it might be surmised that Nera was mistaken for a dead man by the phantom host [...]."[30] Matthias Egeler (2013a, pp. 58 ff.) takes the phantom army in the Hadingus narrative to be an allusion to the Hjaðingavíg/Everlasting Battle legend, which, in his view, is independent of Irish narratives.

As to other features, the happy Otherworld was famed for its fruits and healing herbs. For example, it is reported by travellers to the valley Hvanndalur (pl. Hvanndalir) in northern Iceland from the seventeenth century onwards that in Icelandic folklore the legendary Ódáinsakr ('The Field of Immortality') was located in this valley and that no-one died there: it is said to have contained wonderful healthy herbs which, it seems, bestowed immortality on those who ate them. In 1777, Olaus Olavius visited the area and stated that

> because of their unusual and healthy-smelling herbs, the Sirdal and the Hvanndale were greatly recommended to me, so, with much trouble, I climbed up the latter, where I was shown a level and grassy small field, which was called Ódáinsakr, because it was believed that the herbs which grew there were deadly even for death itself.[31]

The motif of tokens and memorabilia brought back home from the Otherworld as evidence and proof of the truth of the stories – the stalks of hemlock and the fruits of summer respectively in the two tales – is especially common in Irish Otherworld and voyage stories.[32] It also occurs in Saxo's voyages of Thorkillus: a hair taken from the face of Utgarthilocus is brought back home by the voyagers as proof of the truth of their story.[33]

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30 In Saxo's account, the giantess Harthgrepa is killed by her own people after she has summoned up a dead man from the Underworld. The man curses her to death for this transgression and prays for her to be sent beneath the dark lake of hell (Davidson / Fisher [transl.] 1979–1980, I, pp. 23–24; Friis-Jensen / Fisher [transl.] 2015, I, pp. 47 ff.). She may possibly be identified with the woman who visits this world and leads Hadingus to the Underworld and has also similarities with the 'lustful stepmother' type discussed in note 21 above.

31 Olaus Olavius (1787, p. 193): my translation from the German translation of the original Danish. Already in 1689, Thomas Bartholin the Younger refers to Hvanndalir as being the location of Ódáinsakr. See Heizmann 1998, pp. 72–100; Egeler 2015, pp. 102–108; Egeler 2019. See also note 40 and discussion of Hvítramannaland below.

32 See Nagy 1983; Murray 2000; Mac Mathúna 2013, pp. 37–40.

33 Davidson / Fisher ([transl.] 1979–1980, II, p. 147, n. 169) suggest that Saxo may have taken this from a popular tale; the motif of hairs plucked from the devil's beard is found in folktales (ST, H 1273.2).

Nera's role in *Echtra Nera* may be partly based on the historical function of the king's steward, a type of character who actually appears in the Hadingus story. Ailill and Medb hang prisoners in *Echtra Nera* and Hadingus hangs the thieves who steal his treasures, one of whom is the keeper or steward of the treasures.[34]

Both the Nera and Hadingus tales may reflect some very early myths. Georges Dumézil, for example, argues that the Hadingus story represents the transformation of myth into epic, the resemblances between the Vanir god Njǫrðr and Hadingus being such as to suggest that the latter has displaced the former. Njǫrðr has been linked with the fertility goddess Nerthus who, according to Tacitus (*Germania*, ch. 40), was worshipped by a group of seven tribes in northern Germany and Jutland. He calls her *Mater Terra* ('Mother Earth'); and the incestuous relationship between Hadingus and Harthgrepa is also reminiscent of the Divine Twins, a brother and sister pair, like Freyr and Freyja, the children of Njǫrðr in Old Norse myth.[35]

The theme of cattle raiding occurs in *Echtra Nera*, linking it with the central tale of the Ulster Cycle of tales, *Táin Bó Cúailnge* ('The Cattle Raid of Cooley'). While Nera is out of the *síd*, his woman buys a cow which mates with the famous 'Brown Bull of Cúailnge', the Donn Cúailnge. The cow then has a calf which is killed in a fight with the Findbennach, the great Connacht bull, later to be killed itself and dismembered by the Donn Cúailnge in the conclusion of the *Táin*. Bruce Lincoln (1991, pp. 32–48) has argued that the Lord of the Dead in Irish myth, Donn, 'the dusky, dark one' (Proto-Indo-European **dhus-no-*, Welsh *dwn*, Latin *fuscus*, English *dun*), is related to the great Ulster bull, the creator of the Irish landscape from the body parts of the Connacht Findbennach. Donn, the king and leader of the Milesians (Gaels), was the first man to die in Ireland and was ferried to the Island of the Dead in the south of the country, which is appropriately named after him – *Tech nDuinn* ('The House of Donn').[36]

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34 This may have been known to Saxo and to the author of the Nera story from the well-known folk-tale motif (ST, K315.1).

35 Compare the twins Yama and Manu in Indian tradition and the brother and sister twins in later Indo-Iranian literature, Yama and Yimeh, who produced the first human couple. See Lincoln 1991.

36 The classical scholarly account of Donn and *Tech nDuinn* is Meyer 1919. He compares Yama of Vedic tradition with both Donn and the Gaulish divinity Dis Pater, concluding that they derive from the Proto-Indo-European figure who was both first man and lord of the dead. According to Lincoln (1991), Donn has taken the place of **yemos* ('twin') as lord of the dead in Irish tradition; in turn, **yemos*, from which Irish *emon*, *emain* ('twins, a pair') is thought to derive (eDIL s.v. 1 *emon*), gave his name in the form *Emain* to the Otherworld. There are, however, some difficulties here. *Emn(a)e* is the more common name in the early tale *Immram Brain* for the Otherworld and it has been suggested that this may have been the original form of *Emain* (*Emain Macha*), which changed under the influence of *emon, emain* ('twins, a pair', Pokorny 1938, p. 27). It is not possible on linguistic grounds to derive *Emain* from Ἰσάμνιον (*Isamnion*) of Ptolemy's *Geography*, which dates to *c*. 150 AD. Ἰσάμνιον appears to be linked linguistically with *Emn(a)e* rather than with *Emuin/Emain*, the latter probably deriving from **Isamonis*. See Pokorny 1938; TBC, O'Rahilly (ed.) 1976, p. 13, n. 1; Toner 1988, pp. 32–35; Ó Mainnín 2013, p. 253; Egeler 2015, pp. 338 ff. Egeler (2015, pp. 354–358) discusses *Tech nDuinn* and other islands of the dead in the writings of Classical authors such as Procopius of Caesaria (sixth century AD)

Christian visionary literature and the Classical tradition have had some influence on the Hadingus episode and, although a number of the elements which occur in it also figure in other Irish tales, in the Nera story there is no mist, no river of smoke, no weapons floating in the river, no bridge, no people in beautiful royal attire, and so forth. Direct influence of the Irish tale on Hadingus is therefore improbable. As we have seen, however, there are suggestive similarities between the two. While some of these could be the result of them sharing international folklore motifs or of literary borrowing, there may also be remnants and disjointed fragments of Proto-Indo-European myth in both tales.[37]

3.1.3 Analysis of second part of *Þorsteins þáttr*

The second part of *Þorsteins þáttr* concerning the rescuing of the dwarf's son has to do with relations between the world of humans and the world of dwarfs and has the function of providing the magical help required by the hero in his later adventures and conflicts with Otherworld opponents, a common motif which is found also in folktales of this kind; the author has adapted stories about intercourse between humans and dwarfs for his own artistic purposes. One is struck in this part of the narrative by the idea of the receding or disappearing dwarf: he appears out of the blue, and having given his gifts to Þorsteinn, is suddenly absent.[38]

In Modern Irish folklore the Otherworld people are often represented as being small of stature and are called, amongst other names, *Na Daoine Beaga* ('The Small People'). The earliest medieval Irish tale in which they appear as small people, and in which they fulfil human wishes, is *Echtrae Fergusa maic Léti*, 'The Adventure of Fergus son of Lete', which has been dated to the eighth century (Binchy [ed./transl.] 1952). In this tale, the mythical king of Emain, Fergus mac Lete, falls asleep in his chariot close to the water and is dragged into it by water-sprites called *lúc(h)orpáin* ('leprechauns').

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who, in Book VIII of *Bellum Gothicum* describes the island of Britain as being divided by a wall into two parts, east and west, the east having normal climate and vegetation, the west being akin to the land of the dead. This is probably a mythologisation of Hadrian's Wall. Procopius (Haury / Wirth [eds.] 1963, pp. 597–600) also speaks of the tradition of ferrying dead souls from the mainland to the island of *Brittia* (probably 'Britain', although he seems to confuse *Brittia* and *Brittania)*. See also discussion below on the beautiful women in the voyages of Thorkillus in *Gesta Danorum*.

37 See Egeler (2013a, p. 105), who also notes the parallel between the two tales with regard to the initial situation of entering the Underworld, and the motif of the summer fruits in winter. He doubts that the Hadingus story reflects deeply rooted Norse mythological lore attesting to Irish influence on 'living' paganism and suggests that it is likely to be a comparatively late literary borrowing on the part of Saxo.

38 See Ármann Jakobsson 2005; Tolley 2015.

The word *abacc* ('dwarf') is used later in the text instead of *lúc(h)orpán*. Following a suggestion by Jacopo Bisagni (2012) that this latter word may be based on Latin *luperci* – bands of aristocratic young men who ran half-naked around Rome at the Festival of Lupercalia on the 15th February – Patrick Sims-Williams (2015) has argued that the word may have entered the language as a learned cognate for the native term *abacc*, based on a misunderstanding by Irish scholars of *luperci*. A form *luperc(án)*, as witness also *lupracán/luc(h)rupán* (Modern Irish *leipreachán*), may have been re-interpreted as *lúc(h)orpán* (from *lú*, 'small', and *corpán*, 'small body'). In any event, these little people appear but sporadically in early Irish story and mythology, and although associated with the fairies in later literature and folklore, they have characteristics which resemble more the supernatural artisan dwarfs or household familiars of the folklore of European countries (Ó Giolláin 1984). It seems that the leprechaun of Irish tradition was influenced by the classical and biblical traditions and may also be associated, in part at least, with the pan-European folklore tradition.[39]

3.1.4 Conclusion on first and second parts *Þorsteins þáttr*

It seems reasonably clear that the first and second parts of the story contain little which suggests direct influence of Irish tales. The milieu is that of Old Norse-Icelandic culture, with themes reflecting the kind of tales which interested readers and the general public in the period of composition of the late Middle Ages. The underground location of the Otherworld kingdom in 1) bears some resemblance to the domain of the *áes síde* (Otherworld people) in Irish tradition. For example, the Otherworld in both traditions appears to consist of a number of different kingdoms and locations, sometimes situated underground or on islands across the sea. The boundary to the Otherworld in the Irish tradition may also be indicated by a fog or mist or simply by the presence of a site in the landscape such as a stone, as in the second part of the present story. Both the fairy mound and the Underworld in 1) are beneath the earth, the latter apparently at a much deeper level from this world than the former.[40]

39 There is an account in Irish sources of the existence of leprechauns and mermaids as descendants of Cain, a situation which came about due to God's punishment of Cain for slaying Abel, see Rodway 2010. Clive Tolley points out to me (private communication) that the distinctive feature of smallness is not really found in early Germanic sources and may have originated in Ireland. The Scandinavian/Germanic tradition of smallness may also, like the Irish material, be partly based on biblical and classical sources.

40 In Greek myth, Hades is the usual Underworld, and Tartaros figures as an underworld below the Underworld. On caves as gateways and entrances to the Otherworld in Irish tradition (as in *Echtra Nera*), including *Emain* (note 36 above), see Mac Mathúna 2012, pp. 322–343; Ó Mainnín 2013, pp. 279–280; Waddell 2014; Egeler 2015, pp. 345 ff. See also Carey (2000) and Sims-Williams (1990) for further discussion of the location of the Otherworld(s) in Irish sources. Saxo Grammaticus in Book IV: 91 has the first reference to a place which is called *undensakre*, which may be a corruption for Ódáinsakr

However, the relevant Irish stories and the Norse ones are too dissimilar to permit of the conclusion that the former have directly influenced the latter.

3.1.5 Discussion of third part of *Þorsteins þáttr* and the Old Norse-Icelandic analogues

It is the third part of *Þorsteins þáttr*, the voyage to the Otherworld of Glæsisvellir ('Shining Fields'), which may contain themes based on Irish models. Power isolates seventeen elements in the story, which, she argues, are found in other *fornaldarsögur* tales she discusses which also have the Otherworld Journey theme, including *Helga þáttr Þórissonar* (1985a, pp. 157–158).[41] Despite the fact that these two tales differ in their structure and aims, there are many similarities. For present purposes, we give below a brief summary of *Helga þáttr*.

Returning from a trading mission to Finnmark with his brother, Helgi Þórisson goes ashore along the coast of northern Norway. Darkness descends and he gets lost in a wood covered in fog. A group of women ride up, dismount, set up a tent and prepare a feast. The leader of the women greets Helgi by name and asks him to join them. She is Ingibjǫrg, daughter of King Goðmundr of Glæsisvellir, and she is along with her retinue of eleven other women, twelve women in all. They are all wearing red and riding red horses. He sleeps with Ingibjǫrg for three nights and she gives him two chests full of gold and silver respectively when he leaves. He returns to Norway but is abducted by two men the following Christmas and brought to Glæsisvellir. The next year, on the eighth day of Christmas, Helgi appears with two men called Grímr at the court of King Óláfr, having been sent by King Goðmundr to bring two wonderful drinking horns, also called Grímr, to King Óláfr as a mark of respect and friendship. The latter, having heard that Goðmundr is a sorcerer, has the horns blessed, and the two Grímr men spill the ale and leave with a great crash. The Grímr drinking horns disappear during King Óláfr's last battle. The following year, Helgi is left at the king's door. He is blind, his eyes having been gouged out by Ingibjǫrg so that he will not be

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but could possibly mean 'Underworld', paralleling the world of the áes síde, which is located in fairy mounds under the earth, and possibly the Welsh Otherworld of *Annwyfn* ('Very Deep' or 'Not-World'): when Amlethus (Hamlet) had the governor of Scania, Fiallerus, exiled, he is said to have withdrawn to *undensakre* which, Saxo says, is unknown to his people. Olrik (1894, p. 158) took *undensakre* to go back to Danish **undornsakrar* ('south-eastern fields') and assumed *Ódáinsakr* and *Undensakre* to be variant forms of the same name, which he identifies with the land of the dead. Simek (1995, p. 151) also takes Guðmundr of Glæsisvellir to be ruler of the realm of the dead. See further, Heizmann 1998, p. 77; Heizmann 2002, p. 528; Egeler 2015, pp. 38 ff. Grimm (1854, II, p. 783n) suggested that *Ódáinsakr* replaced an original *Óðinsakr* = Valhalla, which is how it is mistakenly spelt in Mac Mathúna (ed.) 1985, p. 244. See also the sections on *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla* and Hvítramannaland below.

41 For the tales in question, see pp. 294–295 and note 22 above. For *Helga þáttr*, see Guðbrandur Vígfússon / Unger (eds.) 1860, pp. 359–362; Tietz (ed./transl.) 2012; see also Egeler 2015, pp. 59–70.

able to give pleasure to other women. He has been set free by Goðmundr through the intercession of King Óláfr's prayers and says that Goðmundr wished to harm the king but was prevented from doing so because of the blessing. Helgi remains there and dies the following year.

For the sake of convenience, we shall collapse the seventeen elements referred to by Power into four categories: (1) the hero decides to go on a journey with companions and reaches a strange Otherworld country where he is welcomed by the inhabitants [Power A–D]; (2) he decides to make a perilous journey to another Otherworld country, seeks information about it, and overcomes the chief obstacle on the way: a dangerous river [Power E–H]; (3) he comes to a hall/castle where he is entertained, becomes involved in contests or occult practices, and defeats and kills an enemy ruler and his followers [Power I–M]; (4) he leaves, acquires a wife, returns home, successful and wealthy, and finally returns to the Otherworld [Power N–Q].

As we have seen, a number of these features are present in medieval Irish narratives, and although Glæsisvellir does not appear in Old Norse material of an earlier period, some of the other features/motifs mentioned above, such as (2) and (3), do figure in the literature. Before considering the nature of possible external influences on the tales, they need to be placed in their own literary continuum and in the contemporary socio-political and cultural milieu in which they were written. Part of that milieu was the re-imagining and rewriting of earlier traditional Old Norse conceptions in line with contemporary trends.[42]

As to our *fornaldarsögur* tales, an important part of their ancestry is narratives and poems relating to Thor's journeys to the Otherworld country of the giant Geirrøðr. The works include: the skaldic poem *Þórsdrápa*, composed in the late tenth century by Eilífr Goðrúnarson, in which Thor, accompanied by Þjálfi, journeys to Giantland;[43] Snorri Sturluson's more elaborate version of this in *Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 18; his tale in *Gylfaginning*, ch. 45 ff., which includes 'Thor's Visit to Útgarða-Loki';[44] references in *Hymiskviða*; and finally, two accounts of journeys made by Thorkillus to the Otherworld as told by Saxo Grammaticus in Book 8 of *Gesta Danorum*, one concerning how he took King Gorm to visit Geruthus, the other about his visit to Utgarthilocus. All these texts involve an Otherworld journey and share many of the same elements identified in *Þorsteins þáttr*. Tolley (2012, p. 85) gives a succinct outline of the pattern, as follows:

> Þórr (or a human whose name is based on Þórr) sets off for the giant realm, accompanied by one or more companions, and has to cross a dangerous river or sea. He receives help from a friendly giantess. The realm of the giants is a place of intense cold or dark, and the hospitality offered there is poor or treacherous. There is a series of contests between Þórr and the giants, which Þórr

42 See Torfi H. Tulinius 2000.

43 Finnur Jónsson (ed.) 1912–1915.

44 Faulkes (ed.) 2005; Faulkes (transl.) 1987; Faulkes (ed.) 1998.

wins, and the contest may involve the destruction of a house-pillar. As Þórr returns he is pursued by the giants, and kills many of them.

In *Þórsdrápa*, Thor, along with his companion Þjálfi, journeys to the land of the giants at the far end of the sea. They travel across the perilous ocean and use the Gríðr pole to get ashore. The giants live in caves on the cliffs, and when Thor arrives, two of Geirrøðr's daughters try to kill him by hoisting him to the roof of a cave. He succeeds in coming down on top of them, crushing their backbones. Geirrøðr throws a molten-iron spike at Thor, who throws it back at him, piercing his guts and killing him. Thor then kills many giants with his hammer.

In Snorri's expanded version in *Skáldskaparmál*, Thor and Loki make a voyage to Geirrøðr and Giantland. They cross a dangerous swollen river and succeed in crossing it with the aid of a magic pole given to Thor by the giantess Gríðr. She also gave him her belt of strength and a pair of iron gloves. They come to the giant's domain where a feast is taking place. Thor is hoisted to the roof of the dwelling by the giant's daughters but succeeds in coming down, breaking their backs. He plays a game with the giant and succeeds in killing him.

Similarities with *Þorsteins þáttr* include: 1) the Otherworld journey to the land of giants, 2) the seeking of information/advice and the crossing of a perilous river, 3) the hall or cave in the other domain in which treacherous hospitality is offered, 4) the contests with the Otherworld people and their defeat by the hero, 5) the return home.[45] On the basis of *Þórsdrápa* and other tales, McKinnell (2005, pp. 202–203) identifies a sub-pattern with five basic features of the story of the hero's journey to a giantess, which he calls the 'Þórr and Geirrøðr pattern'. These five features are quite similar to the five given above. The giantess in these and other *fornaldarsögur* tales is a figure who is rare in other Western medieval literatures. Taking this into consideration, and also the other details we have discussed in respect of Thor's visit to the land of giants which pervades these tales, the basic general pattern, be it the result of diffusion or polygenesis, is firmly embedded in the imaginative world of the medieval Icelanders.

Of the wider pattern given by Power, the main elements not accounted for in the later tales are the love relationship with the Otherworld lady and the assistance given to a friendly king there against his enemy. She has shown that the early part of *Helga þáttr* is based on Marie de France's *Lai de Lanval*, either directly from French or through the Norwegian translation (Power 1985d). Given the fact that during the reign of Håkon Håkonsson (1217–1263) in the first half of the thirteenth century, romance literature in the form of 'Matière de France/Bretagne' was translated into Old Norse in *Strengleikar* (a collection of 21 prose tales based on the *Lais* of Marie de France),[46]

45 The staff and gloves in the first part of *Þorsteins þáttr* may be compared with Thor's stick (which has magical properties) and the gloves he uses to catch the glowing molten spike thrown at him.
46 Cook / Tveitane (eds./transl.) 1979.

together with Arthurian tales such as *Ívens saga* and *Parcevals saga*, the latter based on the story of the Grail, this is not surprising.[47] Some features in *Helga þáttr*, which are not found in the earlier Norse material, may then be accounted for on the basis of the influence of Marie's *Lai de Lanval*. The influence of romance literature may also account for Celtic-style quest-like features and the assistance given to the 'goodie' against the 'baddie'.[48]

We must, however, proceed to Snorri's narrative of Thor's visit to Útgarða-Loki and the voyages of Thorkillus in *Gesta Danorum* before attempting to pull the various strands of the argument together in the concluding part of the investigation.

3.2 Thor's visit to Útgarða-Loki

Snorri's narrative in *Gylfaginning* (ch. 45–67) may be divided into a prologue, two (or three) parts, and an epilogue. The first part is a goat-tale in which Thor, together with Loki, spends the night at a farmer's house and provides food for the family. He kills his own goats, which are his vehicle's draft animals, cooks them, and invites the household for a meal, leaving the bones on the goat skins with which no-one is to tamper. The next morning, he blesses the bones and revives the goats to their former healthy state except that one of them is lame. The farmer's son had on the previous

47 See Kalinke 1999. The romance of Tristan and Iseult appears to have been the first work commissioned by Håkon in 1226 and translated into Icelandic as *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*. It is relevant for our enquiry that the first translations of Arthurian matter into Icelandic, probably at the beginning of the thirteenth century, were *Merlínuspá* (*Prophetiae Merlini*) and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Breta sögur* (*Historia Regum Brittaniae*). On these matters, see Introduction (and *passim*) in Kalinke (ed.) 2011; Egeler 2015, pp. 183 ff. Two other works containing material of Irish provenance and belonging to the courtly milieu, which were commissioned by Håkon, were *Visio Tnugdali*, translated into Old Norse as *Duggals leiðsla* (Cahill [ed./transl.] 2000), and *Speculum Regale* or *Konungs skuggsjá*, which, amongst other things, has much important information on the figure of the *geilt* or madman, a word which was borrowed into Old Norse-Icelandic from Irish *gelt* and occurs also in the collocation *verða at gjalti* ('to go mad with terror'); see description of *gelt* in Magnus Már Lárusson (ed./transl.) 1955, pp. 49 ff.; see also Sayers 1994; Bergholm 2012. *Konungs skuggsjá* has also important information for the purposes of the present enquiry on the wonders of Ireland, in particular on a *viventium insula* (Magnus Már Lárusson [ed./transl.] 1955, p. 44), which seems to be based on an Irish source such as *Do ingantaib Érenn* ('On the wonders of Ireland'), a text dating to the later eleventh or early twelfth century. See note 112 below.

48 Egeler (2015 and 2015a, p. 1, n. 4) argues that the roots of the Ódáinsakr/Glæsisvellir complex are to be found in Celtic sources, specifically in some of the Irish material contained in the *echtrai* and *immrama*. He contends that Arthurian literature cannot provide parallels for the Norse material as closely as can the comparative Irish material. He also correctly affirms in my view that the similarities between the features associated with *Tír inna mBan* ('Land of Women') in Irish and Avalon in Arthurian literature are so close that they must reflect a concrete historical connection between the two motif complexes. See also Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1957, pp. 15–19. For the Arthurian hypothesis, see, for example, Herrmann 1922, pp. 593–594; Krappe 1943; Heizmann 1998; Heizmann 2002.

evening split one bone open to eat the marrow. The god is enraged, but is appeased by accepting the offer of the farmer's son and daughter as his servants.

The second (or second and third) part consists of two sections, the first dealing with Thor's journey across the sea to Giantland and his encounter with the giant Skrýmir, the second with the contests and magic practised in Útgarða-Loki's castle. The narrative pattern underlying the tale, including inter-relationships and congeners, has been the subject of a number of studies over the years.[49] Lindow (2000, p. 170) remarks that research on the story has tended to stress foreign origins and its lack of significant mythic and religious content. Although Ireland has been the foreign source most often referred to by commentators, Clunies Ross (1986), without engaging in detail with the Irish material, states that an Irish loan is unlikely to be ever proven, and, even if it is, the material from it has been incorporated into a story which has a centrally important significance in Old Norse mythic culture: the contests in Útgarða-Loki's realm are against forces the gods themselves cannot overcome – fire, thought, the sea, the *miðgarðr* world-serpent, old age/death – and the tale is concerned with the demise of the gods and the world at *Ragnarǫk*. Lindow agrees, arguing that the tale comments on the structure and nature of the pantheon, throwing light on the respective spheres of activity of Thor and Óðinn, emphasising Thor's role as helper and sustainer of humans. Although the story of Thor's goats may not appear to be particularly relevant to the rest of the tale, Lindow's contention is that it is a unitary tale, one in which this first part is closely connected with the remainder and with the overall frame of *Gylfaginning*.

Tolley (2012), whose focus is more on sources and networks of narrative contacts, suggests that the first part is an aetiological story and may originally have consisted of two separate tales, namely, 'How Þórr got his servants Þjálfi and Rǫskva' and 'How Þórr's goat became lame'. Narratively, it has, in his view, little connection with the second part and was clearly "tacked on to the giant tale". He also suggests that the two episodes/sections in the second part may each have separate origins, the main link being the self-identification of Útgarða-Loki with Skrýmir. His primary concern has been to broaden the scope and frame of reference for the investigation, so that it is not taken for granted that the point of origin of an apparently 'foreign' element is necessarily to be found in a neighbouring culture and tradition which appears to be similar to it.

With regard to the second part, a strong case has been made by von Sydow, and, in particular by Power (1985c) and Egeler (2013b), for the possible influence on 'Thor's Journey to Útgarða-Loki' of an Irish tale akin to *Oidheachtus Find co Teach Cuanna*, 'Fionn's Visit to the house of Cuana', which is contained in the medieval romance *Feis*

49 See, for example, von Sydow 1908; von Sydow 1910; Skogvaard-Petersen 1975; Power 1985a; Clunies Ross 1981; Chesnutt 1989; Heizmann 1998; Lindow 2000; Tietz (ed./transl.) 2012; Tolley 2012; Egeler 2013b; Frog 2014.

Tighe Chonáin and in an oral version of the story, known as *An Óige, an Saol (Mór) agus an Bás* ('Youth, the World and Death'). Although the earliest extant manuscript containing the romance dates to the sixteenth century, it was very popular, as was the oral version of the tale. The former is contained in 57 manuscripts, and 91 versions of the latter had been recorded by the end of the nineteenth century. The literary text may date to a century or two earlier than the first known copy, and while this would bring it closer in date to the thirteenth-century date of the Norse tale, it is still too late to have influenced the latter. The popularity of the tale, however, suggests that it predates this first copy of the literary romance. The basic narrative theme is that Fionn and his companions stay overnight in a stranger's castle (*bruidhean*), where they must contend with personifications of Youth, the World, Old Age and Death. At the end, the castle vanishes.[50] Although there are clear differences between the Irish and Norse tales, some of these could possibly be explained *à la* Power as adaptations to Norse tradition (Power 1985c, p. 225). The evidence presented in her study is very suggestive, and the methodology she adopts, together with some of her conclusions, has recently been reconsidered and applauded by other scholars.[51]

3.3 Talking heads and wells of knowledge

A matter pertinent to some of the *echtrai* and the *fornaldarsögur* deserves to be mentioned briefly here, since according to some scholars it may lend support to the hypothesis of borrowing: it is the significance of *Grímr hinn góði*, Grímr the Good, the speaking drinking horn, which told people of upcoming events and possible dangers that lay ahead. A similar speaking wise head in the Norse tradition is that of Mímir.[52] He also had a horn, out of which Óðinn drank from *Mímis brunnr*, the well of Mímir. Óðinn gave up his eye to Mímir and deposited it in the well in exchange for gaining prophetic knowledge. The well was situated under the world tree of Yggdrasill, and all rivers of the earth had their source in it.

50 Útgarða-Loki's castle also disappears after he has explained to Þórr in the epilogue the meaning of the events which have taken place in the castle, and the trickery which he has employed against him. Since the vanishing castle/fortress/house is very common in the Irish tradition, it is suggested that this element may have been borrowed by the Old Norse-Icelandic tale. The Irish and Norse stories employ a sophisticated symbolism/personification, which led Reidar Th. Christiansen (1959, p. 5) to be in no doubt about the connection between them, it being less likely in his view that the Irish borrowed from the Norse, since the hero's visit to a strange place was much more popular in Irish tradition than in Old Norse. He admitted, however, that the origin of the accounts in both traditions could be some unknown third source.

51 See Tolley 2012; Egeler 2013b. Despite the breadth and influence of von Sydow's 1910 classic study of the myth, both find fault with his methodology and analysis, in particular his catch-all conclusion of a Celtic origin.

52 See *Vǫluspá* 46; *Ynglinga saga*, ch. 47; *Gylfaginning*, ch. 15.

There are similarities here with the well of wisdom and knowledge in Irish tradition, called variously the 'Well of Segais' and 'Connla's Well'. A parallel well was that of Nechtan. According to the Dindshenchas of Bóann (Gwynn [ed./transl.] 1913, pp. 26–39), Nechtan's Well was situated in the *síd* (*Tír Tairngiri* – 'Land of Promise') and was the source of many of the great rivers of Ireland, the Boyne, the Shannon etc. It was guarded by Nechtan and his cupbearers, who were the only ones allowed to approach it and drink from it. Bóann, the wife of Nechtan, in her pride, approached it, and the well erupted, shattering her body, causing her to lose an eye, a foot and a hand, and finally drowning her. Another well appears in *Echtra Cormaic i dTír Tairngire*, 'Cormac's Adventure in the Land of Promise', which is part of *Scél na Fírflatha* (§§25–54).[53]

The loss of Óðinn's eye has been compared with the loss of Bóann's. Von Sydow (1920, pp. 24–25) takes this view, as does Ross (1962, pp. 36–46, at 41). The further linkage with the severed head is also suggestive of Celtic influence. The head was revered in Celtic tradition as the seat of wisdom and occurs not only in literature and myth but is also widespread in iconography. Simpson (1962–1965) argued that the talking head is ultimately of Welsh origin, representing a fusion of traditions concerning Bran's Head, as related in *Branwen Ferch Lyr*, the Second Branch of the *Mabinogi*, and those traditions which are presumed to have existed concerning his horn.

Bran's myth may be a source of the Grail legend and the figure of the Fisher King in Arthurian literature, who also was wounded in the foot. The linkage of the severed head with Otherworld feasting occurs in the Irish tradition too, but is not to my knowledge specifically linked with drinking horns or with the Well of Wisdom. As Tietz points out, the true uniqueness of Grímr is that the wise prophetic head is linked with the drinking horn, which does not occur in Bran's case nor in the Irish material.[54]

The similarities between the Celtic and Norse traditions may constitute variant versions and developments of underlying shared myths. Matthias Egeler (2013a, p. 88) is not convinced of the suggested parallel between the loss of Óðinn's and Bóann's eye and points out that, even if there is a Celtic basis for the severed head in Old Norse-Icelandic, it has yet to be proven conclusively.[55]

53 On this matter, see also TBC, O'Rahilly (ed.) 1976; Mac Mathúna 2014, pp. 60–65; Toner 2014, pp. 279–282; Tolley in this volume.

54 Tietz (ed./transl.) 2012, p. 169.

55 Clive Tolley (personal communication) says that Egeler is probably right to be cautious, but that there may be some connection between the two traditions: "I am more and more inclined to see some commonality of motifs between Celtic and Germanic areas on the Continent, going back a long way into prehistory: we can't exactly say borrowings, but just an areal commonality of tradition, from which it spread northward into Scandinavia, and westwards into Britain. When contact took place in the Viking period, inherited motifs are likely to have been strengthened when people realized they had some features in common, so cultural contact leads to a reassertion of commonalities".

4 The voyages of Thorkillus in *Gesta Danorum*

Saxo Grammaticus in Book 8 of *Gesta Danorum* (VIII.14.1–20) tells of two voyages made by Thorkillus and others to the realms of Geruthus and Utgarthilocus, respectively.[56] There are two locations for the Otherworld in the first voyage: the country of Guthmundus and the realm of his brother, Geruthus, the two lands being separated by a bridge; in the second voyage, there is only the country of Utgarthilocus, which has parallels with that of Geruthus in the first voyage. The first voyage tale is by far the longer of the two.

Power takes Saxo's Thorkillus voyages to be an imperfectly remembered version of a tale which had taken shape by the end of the twelfth century, best exemplified by *Þorsteins þáttr*, combined with 'a similarly imperfect version' of the myth of Þórr and Geirrøðr. Given this to be the case, the question arises as to what Saxo does with these raw ingredients? Do we simply have an amalgam of an imperfectly remembered Icelandic tale (or tales) which is presented in order to entertain and edify the reader in regard to past Nordic legendary history, or/and does the tale have allegorical significance from the point of view of Christianity and the history of Denmark? The importance of Christianity in Saxo's work has been noted by previous scholars, including Inge Skovgaard-Petersen (1970; 1975) and Karsten Friis-Jensen (1975). They take the sixth book to be the hinge which separates the earlier books on pre-Christian Denmark from the following ones on Christian Denmark. Thorkillus's voyages symbolize the point at which the nation of Denmark realizes the errors of heathendom and embraces the Christian truth: Thorkillus brings home the bad news to King Gorm that the pagan god Utgarthilocus is impotent, and the good news (Gospel) of the Christian God.[57]

With regard to Classical influence, Saxo states that, had the four men who accepted Guthmundus's offer of women been more temperate, they could have equalled the glories of Hercules, a statement which is indicative of some kind of knowledge of the Hercules story.[58] On closer examination, a number of correspondences between the voyages and Classical literature come to light: it appears that the author has drawn on knowledge of various stories, including the Labours of Hercules,[59] the legend of Prometheus in the *Odyssey*, and Virgil's *Aeneid*.[60] The relevant

56 Olrik / Ræder (eds.) 1931/1957; Friis-Jensen / Fisher (transl.) 2015.

57 See Egeler 2015, pp. 20–34 for a recent discussion of the Thorkillus voyages.

58 As noted by Simpson (1966, pp. 8 ff.), the author may have been aware of the *interpretatio Romana* which identified Thor with Hercules and Jupiter (see also Davidson / Fisher [transl.] 1979–1980, II, p. 144).

59 See also Book IV of *Gesta Danorum* where Saxo states that Amlethus's courage would have allowed him to surpass the labours of Hercules if fate had treated him more kindly. See Davidson / Fisher (transl.) 1979–1980, II, p. 101.

60 Friis-Jensen analyses the correspondences between *Gesta Danorum* and the works of Virgil but restricts the examination to the analogues noted by Olrik and Ræder in their edition (1931).

Labours of Hercules are the eleventh and twelfth, which are concerned with the apples of the Garden of Hesperides and the monster Cerberus respectively. While one must be cautious with respect to positing direct Classical influence on Icelandic literature in many instances, Saxo may have been familiar with some of the Greek material through Latin translations in anthologies and florilegia and may also have had access to the *Fabulae* of Hyginus, which summarise the *Odyssey*.[61]

It is instructive to review in more detail than has hitherto been done the elements and motifs contained in these texts which have parallels in Irish and Classical sources.

5 Irish/Hiberno-Latin and Classical parallels

5.1 Three boats covered in ox-hides

The feature of three boats covered in ox-hides mentioned in Thorkillus's first voyage is matched by a similar feature in *Grænlendinga saga*: on their mission to Vínland, Þorvaldr Eiríksson and his companions encountered native Skrælings for the first time; they found three skin-covered boats with three men lying under each boat. Later, many men in a number of skin-covered boats attacked them, resulting in the death of Þorvaldr.[62]

Boats covered in ox-hides are also a prominent feature of the Irish *immrama* and Brendan voyages. In the first voyage of the *Vita Brendani*/*Betha Brénainn*, Brendan has three boats built, with three rows of oars in each, three sails of hides, and thirty men in each boat;[63] in the *Navigatio Brendani* (ch. 4), he has a light boat ribbed with wood and a wooden frame built, which is covered with ox-hides. They also carry enough hides for the making of two other boats. In *Immram Máele Dúin*, Máel Dúin has a three-skinned boat built with a crew of 17, or, according to others, 60.[64]

The threesomes are typical elements of storytelling, both oral and written, and occur throughout Saxo's version and in the other versions too. Taken in isolation, they do not constitute sufficient evidence of borrowing. However, similar threesomes are clustered together in the Irish voyage tales and in Saxo's voyages and, when taken along with the boats being covered in ox-hides and the other contextual features to be discussed below, we have interesting parallels with the Irish material which are worthy of further consideration.[65]

61 I am grateful to Dr Egeler for this suggestion.

62 *Flateyjarbók* I, pp. 541–542.

63 See VSH, I, 1910, p. 107, ch. xv; Stokes (ed./transl.) 1890, lines 3,573 ff.

64 Oskamp (ed./transl.) 1970, pp. 105–106. On the hides, see Wooding 2000c.

65 Nansen (1911, I, pp. 337–338) gives a list of threesomes in *Eiríks saga rauða*, noting that in the Irish voyage tales of Máel Dúin and the Uí Chorra, the repetition of the number three is even more conspicuous. He compares the death of three of Eiríkr's voyagers – two in the fight with the Skrælings and

5.2 The house full of treasures

As pointed out earlier, the Otherworld as a place containing wonderful treasures is a commonplace, not only in Old Norse and Celtic tales but also in the tales of other traditions. The role of treasure is a central element of *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns* and *Helga þáttr* Þórissonar, but its mere presence in the narratives of the two traditions does not help in determining a possible Irish provenance for it. Geruthus's great ramshackle filthy house full of treasures, on the other hand, is similar to the uninhabited houses or deserted citadels full of treasures, provisions of food and drink, and beds in the Máel Dúin and Brendan voyage stories. In all three stories, there are three kinds of precious objects. In *Máel Dúin* (§11), three rows of objects are on the wall: one of golden and silver brooches, another of necklets, and a third of swords. The house is guarded by a small cat which jumps through one of Máel Dúin's fosterbrothers like a burning arrow when he steals one of the necklets, turning him to ashes. In the *Navigatio* (§§6, 7), hanging along the walls are metal vessels, bridles, and horns encased in silver. In the house on the high craggy island in which Geruthus dwells, the objects are belts of gold with silver circlets, a stag horn with gems, and a bracelet. In both the Irish and Old Norse tales, the crew are warned by Máel Dúin, Brendan and Thorkillus respectively not to steal any of the valuable treasures. One of the latecoming monks in the *Navigatio* steals a silver bridle and later dies and covetousness leads three crew members in the Torkillus voyage to take one each of the precious objects, which brings about their deaths. In Saxo's voyages and the *Navigatio*, one of the objects is stag horn(s), a prominent feature also in *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns* and *Helga þáttr Þórissonar*. In the latter two stories, these precious objects are also stolen.

In another *fornaldarsaga*, *Yngvars saga víðfǫrla* ('The Saga of Yngvarr the Far–Traveller', §5), at the ends of the earth,[66] one of Yngvarr's men, the Icelander Garða-Ketill, steals a silver pot handle, which was on a fire close to a large house. He is followed by a giant, drops the pot, but keeps the handle which he breaks up and puts into his luggage. When Sveinn Yngvarsson later reaches this house (§9), he sees a large man – one of those, says the text, who are called Cyclopes – running off with his companions, who had clubs in their hands as big as beams. Sveinn's men steal furs, silver, and all kinds of precious metals from the house.

Mention of the Cyclopes is no doubt indebted to knowledge of the story contained in the *Odyssey*. In Book 9, Odysseus and his men landed on an island in the

later the death of Þorvaldr – with the loss of the three voyagers in the Brendan and Máel Dúin tales. This parallel is not close enough in my view to conclude that the Norse tale has borrowed from the Irish, the instance in *Eiríks saga rauða* probably representing the general penchant for threesomes in folktales.

66 Adam of Bremen: *Gesta* (IV.39) tells the story of a voyage by Haraldr harðráði (d. 1066) to explore the Northern Seas at the end of the world, where he almost perished in the great abyss of the gap. See also note 69 below.

neighbourhood of the land of the Cyclopes, a wooded and fertile country overrun with wild goats similar to that of the precipitous island in Saxo's account (see below). Odysseus then went over in his own boat with twelve of his men to the island of the Cyclopes, leaving twelve boats behind. They found a cave high up on the island in the face of a mountain cliff, which had a station for sheep and goats with high walls around it. Entering the cave, they found many types of provisions – cheeses of various kinds, together with lambs and goats – which the men wanted to take with them to the ship, but were not permitted to do so by Odysseus (see below on the subject of theft). This was the abode of the giant Polyphemus. Although the voyagers partook of the food and drink, these goodies had not been left there as a gesture of hospitality by the owner, as appears to be the case in the Irish examples noted above.

The treasures in Geruthus' abode, and the theft of these by three crew members, provide an analogue to the deserted house full of provisions in the Irish tradition, and whilst the Classical tradition, Adam of Bremen's account of a voyage of exploration by Frisian nobles to the far north, and the penchant for threesomes have clearly exercised a major influence on the episode, some influence from Irish sources cannot be entirely ruled out.

5.3 The precipitous island: Theft, loss of companions and supernumeraries

The first land which the voyagers reach is neither the land of Geruthus, the land which the voyagers seek, nor the *terra repromissionis* of the Bible/*Navigatio Brendani*. However, the use of the words [...] *attente promissi litoris presidium expectantes* (ch. 8, 286:40) in connection with the land of Geruthus, which comes after the description of the boats covered with ox-hides, is reminiscent of the goal of the *Navigatio*, the *terra repromissionis* which the Irish voyagers also seek out in a boat covered with ox-hides.[67] Although Guthmundus is not mentioned by name, the description of the island has similarities with the description of his realm given later and may be viewed as a kind of doublet. It is a precipitous island, as are the islands of the deserted dwellings in *Immram Curaig Maéle Dúin* and the *Navigatio*. The voyagers in Saxo's story climb steep paths which lead them to herds of cattle and goats; they are warned by Thorkillus not to over-indulge themselves by taking more meat than they need, but they disregard this admonishment and their greed leads to them being attacked by monsters. The great giant who wades out into the water is reminiscent of Polyphemus, and, contextually in the story, to Guthmundus. Some details in Saxo's

67 Saxo's words should be viewed primarily in the context of the goal of the voyagers, namely, the land of Geruthus, to which Thorkillus has supposedly promised to lead them. The similarlity with the *Navigatio* could be purely accidental.

account, such as the giant wielding a club, appears to be based on the *Aeneid*, Book 3, in which Polyphemus descends to the shore using a lopped pine tree as a walking staff. His roar of frustration brought the other Cyclopes down to the water as Aeneas made his getaway. The *Aeneid* version is based on the Homeric story above, which tells that Odysseus blinded Polyphemus with a red-hot stake, a wooden club which the giant intended to use as a staff.[68]

For their crime of greed on the precipitous island, the giant/monster who wades into the water after them demands that the voyagers sacrifice three companions before they can move on. Thorkillus agrees to this, as it is clear that the voyage can only be successfully continued if this is done. The three are chosen by lot and hence take the blame for the entire crew. We may compare this with the motif of the three crew members who try to steal treasures from Geruthus's house and with the three who are killed or injured while exiting the dwelling of Utgarthilocus in the second voyage. The latter three seem also to take the blame for the crimes of the many, while the fate of the thieves in Geruthus's house is linked to their own crime, the treasures they seek to steal turning on them with murderous intent.[69]

There are close parallels in the Irish voyage tales to the loss or death of three voyagers. In these tales, the loss of three companions is linked with the motif of three supernumeraries or undesirables, who generally join the crew later than the others: in the *Navigatio*, there are three monks; in *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin*, three foster-brothers; in *Immram Curaig Ua Corra*, a jester, smith and gillie; and in *Vita Brendani*, a jester, smiths and shipwrights. Most of these supernumeraries disappear during the course of the voyage, one of them, as we have seen in the *Máel Dúin* voyage and the

68 The captivity and defeat of the goat-keeping giant in *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundr berserkjabana* appears to be an adaptation of the Polyphemus story in the *Odyssey*.

69 There are also close parallels between the land of Geruthus and the precipitous island described in Adam of Bremen's account of a group of Frisian nobles who went on a voyage of exploration, seeking a land in the North Sea, which brought them to the ends of the earth (*Gesta* IV.40–41). Having travelled to the Orkney Islands and a glacial-covered island of ice, the Frisians encountered a maelstrom in a land of darkness in the area of the North Pole; those who survived the currents landed on a precipitous island where the people hid in underground caves. There were gold and precious metals beside the caves and the mariners sought to take as much as they could to the ships. They were followed by men of great size, called Cyclopes, before whom ran dogs of enormous size. The dogs tore pieces out of one of the voyagers. See Herrmann 1922, p. 595; Skogvaard-Petersen 1975, p. 25; Skogvaard-Petersen 1985, pp. 945 ff.; Simek 1986, p. 258; Egeler 2015, pp. 23–26. This account seems to have been one of the sources for Saxo's description of the Thorkillus voyages. Classical sources are clearly evident here, also in that the maelstrom is reminiscent of the whirlpool Charybdis. Egeler (2015, pp. 25 ff.) also refers to *Fabulae* 125 of Hyginus, in which it is related that whoever lays hands on the treasures of the island of the Cyclopes will be torn apart by the dogs. These stories of voyages to the far north, in the writings of Classical authors and historical sources, such as Adam's work, provide source material for the authors of the *fornaldarsögur*, just as the voyages of saints to remote islands in the west and north which are contained in the Lives of Irish saints provide basic sources of inspiration for the authors of the *immrama*.

Navigatio, in the uninhabited house, one on an island of ceaselessly laughing and playing people[70] or incessantly moving psalm-singers,[71] one on an island of wailing and weeping people,[72] and one in a fiery mountain.[73] Whilst in *Immram Ua Corra*, the jester dies on board ship, in *Vita Brendani* he is asked to sacrifice himself by jumping overboard when the ship is attacked by monstrous mice. The smith dies on board and there is no reference to the death or disappearance of a third supernumerary.[74] In *Immram Ua Corra* it is said that the gillie will remain in Britain and die there.

The crew members on the Islands of Laughers and Wailers become like the inhabitants and appear to lose their wits and become forgetful (see also the section on beautiful women below). An analogous transformation occurs on the Island of Conforming Sheep and Rods in *Immram Máele Dúin* (§12). The voyagers come to an island, divided by a rampart, with two herds of sheep, one white and one black. When the herdsman throws a black sheep amongst the white ones, it becomes white and vice versa. The voyagers throw in white and black rods to test if the same happens to them. When it does, they decide to move on. In Book 9 of the *Odyssey*, prior to the episode of the Island of the Cyclopes, the voyagers reach the Island of Lotus-Eaters. Three men who go to check on the inhabitants eat the Lotus plant and become forgetful and apathetic with no interest in returning to their companions. It is only with great difficulty that Odysseus succeeds in getting them back to the ships. The same applies here in Saxo's tale. Thorkillus warns his men not to partake of the food or drink offered by Guthmundus nor to fraternize with the women because anyone who did so would become one of the monsters, lose his memory, and remain there for ever.[75]

Not all supernumeraries are latecomers. For example, in *Immram Brain*, the hero's three foster brothers are there from the outset, and only some of the supernumeraries in the tales, but not all, are guilty during the course of the voyage of having committed an offence: it is only in *Máel Dúin* that the successful outcome of the voyage is explicitly linked with the loss of the supernumeraries. In Saxo's tale, the mariners who die are not presented as supernumeraries, and the only object stolen which is matched by the Irish/Hiberno-Latin texts is the horn in the *Navigatio* episode. There are close Classical parallels also to the loss of companions. Despite being warned against it, Odysseus's companions slaughter cattle from the sacred herd of Helios on the island of the Sun God; as punishment, Zeus has their ship destroyed and all the crew drown except Odysseus himself.[76]

70 *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin* §31; *Immram Ua Corra* §§48, 75; also *Immram Brain* §61.
71 *Navigatio Brendani* §17.
72 *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin* §15, *Immram Ua Corra* §§44 ff.
73 *Navigatio Brendani* §24.
74 *Vita Brendani* §§10, 12, 13, 15.
75 Davidson / Fisher (transl.) 1979–1980, I, p. 264; Friis-Jensen / Fisher (transl.) 2015, I, p. 603.
76 As to Classical influence on the Irish voyage tales, see Zimmer (1889) who argued that the *immrama* came about in direct imitation of the adventures of Aeneas in the *Aeneid*. William Flint Thrall (1917;

5.4 The tripartite nature of truth

Saxo has an episode in the Thorkillus voyages section of Book 8 of *Gesta Danorum* in which Thorkillus enters the cave of two eagle-headed giant monsters and asks them information about the way to Utgarthilocus. They will only give him this information if he utters three true sayings; having done so to their satisfaction, he then asks them for fire but must first pronounce a further three true sayings to get it. The closest parallels to this episode appear to be in the ballads of Illugi and in the late *fornaldarsaga* about him, *Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra*. The relationship between the ballads and the saga has been the subject of studies by both Knut Liestol (1915) and Davið Erlingsson (1975).[77]

Davið Erlingsson argues that the ballad, or an oral saga, takes precedence over the written saga and that it is of a composite nature, being comprised of two tale types, one a tale about a hero's quest for fire, which he obtains by telling three truths, and another concerning the abduction and rescue of a young maiden or princess. He takes the first tale type to be based on the Saxo episode and examines and compares in particular the fire episode and three truths in the different sources.

The saga relates that Illugi seeks fire in a cave from the troll-woman Gríður, who tells him that if he can utter three true sayings, she will give him what he needs and allow him to sleep with her daughter. He produces sayings similar to those in Saxo: 'Your cave is high and wide and I have never seen a bigger or a stronger house'; 'your nose is large too, and I have never seen a creature as grotesque and black, so that the floor looks fair in comparison'; 'I have seen nothing more loathsome than you, but your daughter is indeed fair'.

Herrmann (1922, p. 600) conjectured that the source of the motif of the three truths may be of literary origin and that it reached Iceland via the *Gesta Romanorum*. Tale 58 in this collection tells of a law whereby a criminal who has been condemned to death could escape if he uttered three true statements which could not be contradicted. A brigand, who had committed many crimes, saved himself by declaring first, that he had always been a bad man, secondly, that he did not like the situation in which he found himself, and thirdly that, if he ever got out of that place, he would not willingly return.[78]

1923), however, compared parallel incidents in the *Aeneid* and the 'Voyage of Máel Dúin' and concluded that the latter could not be structurally dependent on the former. Nevertheless, he stated that a learned (Irish) writer would incorporate elements from Classical stories, especially if they were similar to his own composition. There is no proof that the *Odyssey* was known in Early Medieval Ireland (Miles 2011, p. 35). As to its possible influence on the Irish material, Egeler (2015, p. 295) reminds us that Selmer believed the *Navigatio* to have been written on the Continent in Lotharingia (see Selmer 1959).

77 See also the recent discussion and reassessment by Philip Lavender ([ed./transl.] 2015, pp. xi–xvi).

78 Davidson / Fisher ([transl.] 1979–1980, II, p. 147, n. 167) suggest that the source of the second three truths in Saxo may be the Snio tale in the Danish Chronicles which is concerned with Snio's visit to the giant Lethrense. See *Chronicon Lethrense* vi (Gertz [ed.] 1917, pp. 50–51).

The motif of the truth contest, with three truths being the norm, is commonplace in folktales and is found in various medieval sources.[79] In addition to examples discussed elsewhere in this context, we may also refer to the three true sayings in an episode in the Irish tale concerning Cormac mac Airt, *Echtrae Cormaic maic Airt* (Stokes [ed./transl.] 1891), discussed above. This tale is principally concerned with sovereignty, the threefold nature of truth being representative of the tripartite structure of society. While Cormac is in the Otherworld, a pig can only be cooked by uttering three truths over it. This is done. Cormac utters a fourth truth, which is the overarching and integrating king's truth (Section 51, p. 197). His family are then restored to him. He is also shown a cup which breaks in three when three falsehoods are uttered over it, but is made whole again when three truths are told (Section 52, p. 197).

This episode in Saxo's account is central to the entire tale of the voyages. Essentially, it has to do with the first glimpse the voyagers get of the light of knowledge, of their emergence from the darkness of ignorance into the light of true understanding. By successfully overcoming the obstacles placed in their way, they can now make their way to their destination where the hero will acquire full insight into the deep nature of that light and fire which he has received: it is the light and knowledge of the true Christian God (see discussion below on *The Christian Element and Message*).

5.5 Beautiful women: Caught in a trap

Beautiful women appear in the shape of the twelve daughters of Guthmundus in Saxo's tale and the twelve women in *Helga þáttr Þórissonar*. Although they do not explicitly act as guardians of Guthmundus's garden, his daughters appear to live beside it and hence seem to parallel the Hesperides, nymphs who were the daughters of Atlas, the titan who held up the sky and the earth on his shoulders. Hercules travelled far in his search for the Garden of the Hesperides, combating and wrestling various challengers before coming upon the bound Prometheus, whom he released and who told him how to get the apples. In Old Norse myth, the goddess Iðunn is the guardian of the apples of youthfulness and immortality.[80] The giant Þjazi, in the form of an eagle, stole her away from Ásgarðr with the result that the gods grew old.[81] She is finally rescued by Loki. One might also compare the Irish tale of *Oidheadh Chloinne Tuireann*, 'The Death of the Children of Tuireann' (O'Curry [ed./transl.] 1863; O'Duffy [ed./transl.] 1888), composed in the Early Modern period but containing material based on earlier sources,[82] in which the sons of Tuireann assume the guise of hawks in order to steal the apples of Hisberna. They are pursued by the guardians of the garden who are

79 See Lavender (ed./transl.) 2015, p. xxv.
80 See Bugge 1889.
81 See Richard North's 1997 edition and discussion of Þjóðólfr's poem.
82 See Thurneysen 1918.

female figures. Given the similarity between the name of the garden, Hisberna, with the Garden of the Hesperides, it is clear that the author has been inspired by some kind of knowledge of the Greek story, as no doubt Saxo has also been in his description of the beautiful daughters of Guthmundus.

Such women also figure in the Irish tradition in the form of the Otherworld women who, as noted earlier, come from a land peopled by women and maidens (*Tír inna mBan*) in *Immram Brain* and *Echtrae Chonnlai*. In *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin* (§28), the voyagers sojourn on an island of women, and in *Serglige Con Culainn* and other tales women also figure very prominently. These women are often depicted as coming from faraway islands to this world, bearing apples or apple/fruited branches with which they lure mortal men;[83] in some tales, such as the Early Irish *Immram Brain*, the Otherworld domain is called *Emain/Emn(a)e*. When the adjective *ablach* ('apple-treed') is added, we get *Emain Ablach* ('Emain of the Apple Trees'), a term used for the Otherworld in later sources. The word *ablach* (< Early Irish *aball* – 'apple–tree' < *aballā* < *abalnā*) is etymologically related to Welsh *yfallach* and 'Avalon', the *Insula Avallonis*, described by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his work of 1136, *Historia Regum Brittaniae*, as being Arthur's last resting place, from which he will come one day to defeat his enemies.[84] In *Vita Merlini*, Geoffrey calls it *Insula Pomorum* ('The Island of the Apples') and identifies it with *Insula Fortunata* (*quae Fortunata vocatur*), the description being almost identical with Isidore's account of the *Fortunatarum*

83 Egeler (2019) sets out the case for the borrowing from Irish into Old Norse of the motif of the Otherworld women and other motifs in the Ódáinsakr/Glæsisvellir complex.

84 *Emain Ablach* of Irish tradition is identified both with the Isle of Man and with Otherworld islands in early sources, and the interweaving of these worldly and otherworldly locations are expressed by the bardic poet Muireadhach Albanach Ó Dálaigh in an early thirteenth-century bardic poem to Raghnall, king of Man (d. 1229), *Baile suthach síth Emhna* (Ó Cuív 1955–1957; Ó Mainnín 2013, pp. 266 ff.). This poem, which dates to *c.* 1200 AD, is addressed to Raghnall who ruled the Isle of Man between the 1180s and 1220s. He is referred to in *Orkneyinga saga* (ch. 110) as Rǫgnvaldr, the greatest warrior in the western lands (*Rǫgnvaldr konungr var þá mestr hermaðr í Vestrlǫndum.*). Egeler (2015, p. 343) points out that Rǫgnvaldr's ancestors included the Norse kings of Dublin and that the poem in question demonstrates the multicultural Gaelic-Norse cultural world in which he operated. On mythical islands in Irish folklore, many of which have associations with the Irish sea god Manannán mac Lir, see Ó hÓgáin 1999. Chotzen 1948, p. 262 suggests that both *Avalon* (Welsh: *Ynys Afallach*) and the motif of the magic apples/apple-trees have been borrowed from the Irish (*Emain*) *Ablach*, having been possibly introduced into the Brythonic tradition by Caradoc of Llancarfan, author of *Vita Gildae*, a Life of Gildas, which appears to date to about 1125. Egeler (2015, p. 479) disputes this derivation from Irish, pointing out that the earliest examples of the term *Emain Ablach* post-date the Arthurian references. Barinthus, the pilot who ferries Arthur's companions to Avalon in *Vita Merlini*, has the same name as the monk in *Navigatio Brendani*, who tells Brendan of a visit he had made to the *terra repromssionis sanctorum*. The author is clearly indebted to the *Navigatio*; moreover, the description of the paradisal *terra repromissionis sanctorum* at the beginning of the *Navigatio* is paralleled in Isidore's description and in the *Vita Merlini*.

insulae, on which it seems to be based.[85] It is inhabited by the sorceress, shapeshifter and healer Morgen and her eight sisters. Morgen knows the qualities of herbs and plants, and Arthur is taken to her after the Battle of Camlann so that she can cure his wounds. Geoffrey was probably influenced in this regard by the account of the first-century Roman geographer Pomponius Mela who, in his work *De Chorographia* (III.6), described the Island of Sena, located off the coast of Brittany, as being inhabited by nine priestesses who were reputed to have powers of healing, shapeshifting and prophesy. Posidonius, as recorded by Strabo in his *Geography* (IV.6), also gave an account of a similar island off the Loire river, which was inhabited by priestesses.[86]

In his *Naturalis historia*, Pliny (XXXV11.xi.35 ff.) refers to *Abalum/Abalus*, which was mentioned by Pytheas, as a fabulous amber island in the north.[87] He also says (IV. vvi.103) that on the other side of Britain, in the direction of the German sea, are the *Glaesiae* which the Greeks called Amber Island. The word *Glaesiae* appears to be etymologically related to the name of Guðmundr's realm *Glæsisvellir* ('Shining Fields') in Norse tradition.[88] The name calls to mind both *Ynis Gutrin*/*Insula Vitrea*/*Glass Island* (Glastonbury/Avalon) of Arthurian tradition and the abundance of glass, crystal and precious stones in the Otherworld islands of the *echtrai*, *immrama* and *Navigatio*.[89]

The fairy mistress who entices a mortal man to her domain is a common motif in folktales: she falls in love with him (and/or he with her) and refuses to let him leave. The most famous example in Classical tradition of this *femme fatale* is Calypso on

85 Egeler (2015, p. 187) notes that a more or less identical description from Isidore occurs in Rabanus Maurus's *De universo* XII.5, which could also be the source. Isidore's islands of fortunate women become a single island in Geoffrey's account, which he conflates with the apples of the Isles of the Hesperides to produce Avalon of Glastonbury. See Clarke (ed./transl.) 1973, p. 147.

86 The parallels between the description and details relating to the Island of Avalon in *Vita Merlini* and the Island of Sena in Pomponius Mela's *De Chorographia* are so close as to suggest direct dependency of the *Vita* on Pomponius. See the discussion of Avalon and the *matière de Bretagne* in Egeler 2015, pp. 181–234.

87 See Heizmann 1998; Bandle (ed.) 2002, p. 597; Egeler 2015, pp. 416–425.

88 On the etymology, cf. Old Norse *gler* ('glass'), Old High German *glas* ('glass'), Old English *glæs* ('glass')/*glær* ('amber'), Latin *glesum* ('glass'). The form *Glasisvellir* also appears in some sources instead of *Glæsisvellir*, which may indicate that the word and concept is connected with the mythical tree/grove *Glasir*, which in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 34 (verse 142) is said to stand with golden leaves before Valhalla (*Glasir stendr / með gullnu laufi* [...]). For this matter and further discussion of Glæsisvellir in general, see, for example, recent works by Simek 1986, p. 265; Heizmann 1998, pp. 89–95; Egeler 2015, pp. 36 ff., 418–425.

89 *Immram Brain*, for example, refers to the Otherworld woman carrying a branch of the apple-tree of Emain with twigs of white silver (§3: *gésci findarcait*) and leaves of crystal (§3: *abrait glano co mbláthaib*); dragonstones and crystals drop on to the land of Aircthech (§12: *má adcetha Aircthech íar tain* / *for-snig dracoin ocus glain*); the sea washes the wave against the land with tresses of crystal (dropping) from its mane (§12: *do-snig a mmuir fri tír toinn / trillsi glana asa moing*; the woman in *Echtrae Chonnlai* takes the hero in her crystal ship (§ *im loing glano*) to her Otherworld home; there is an island with a glass bridge in *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin* (§17) and *Immram Curaig Ua Corra* (§54), and a Sea of Glass in the Máel Dúin tale (§22) and the *Navigatio* (§21).

her island of Ogygia who, for love of Odysseus, conceals him and keeps him prisoner on the island for seven years (*Odyssey*, Book 5). Despite the fact that she offers him immortality on her beautiful blessed Otherworld, he yearns to return home.[90] Frequently in folktales and written sources, if the mortal man consumes food or drink, he is doomed to spend eternity in the land of enchantment, hence Thorkillus's warning in this regard to his men. In *Yngvars saga víðfǫrla*, the hero also warns his men not to speak with the heathens and to keep away from the women in the land of Queen Silkisif and the kingdom of King Jólfr. While the Yngvarr narrative is quite realistic in places and has a Christian moral in the hero's admonishment to his men, these women are on a par with the Otherworld women. In the story of the Thorkillus voyages, the same fate awaits both the four men who succumbed to the temptation of the women and also the king's friend, Buchi. Although the latter managed to wrest himself from his paramour, he did not succeed in leaving the other domain. In *The Voyage of Máel Dúin*, the men only succeed in escaping from the island of the women by cutting off the hand of the crew member who had caught the ball of thread thrown by the queen of the island, who is trying to pull the boat ashore. The ball of thread stuck to the hand of the crew member, just as it had to Máel Dúin's hand on a previous occasion when the queen succeeded in pulling the boat back ashore. The same ploy is employed by the women in the Bran story to pull the boat ashore.[91] This inability to let go of certain otherworldly objects is a folklore motif ('Magic adhesion', ST, D2171).

It appears to be coincidental, rather than a question of borrowing from Irish sources, that Thorkillus and other voyagers in Old Norse tales concerning journeys to the distant north – to Bjarmaland, the White Sea area (Gandvík), and the Otherworld of Guthmundus and Geruthus – travel close to a region called Kvenland, a land considered by some commentators to be inhabited by women, like the Irish *Tír na mBan*. Adam of Bremen mentions a *terra/patria feminarum* four times in *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (III.xv; IV.xiv; IV.xvii; IV.xix); there is also a later scholia (119), not written by Adam himself, which is an amendment to, or expansion of IV.xix. In III.xv.19, he records that king Emund of Sweden (1050–1060) sent his son Anund (Önundr) out of the country to expand his empire; Anund came to *patria/terra feminarum* ('the land of women'), who are considered to be Amazons, and was killed there by them.[92]

90 See Jensen 1994 for a good analysis of the portrayal of Calypso and Circe in the *Odyssey*.

91 Otherworld women are also often depicted as being weavers – for example Penelope, Circe and Calypso in the *Odyssey* – and spun thread is used by Ariadne to lead Theseus to the labyrinth and safely out again.

92 *Et primo quidem filius regis [.i. Emund] nomine Anund, a patre missus ad dilatandum imperium, cum in patriam feminarum pervenisset, quas nos arbitramus Amazonas esse, veneno, quod illae fontibus immiscuerunt, tam ipse, quam exercitus eius perierunt.*

It is quite possible that the Classical accounts of Amazon women were known in early medieval Ireland, but whether a *terra feminarum* located in the far north was known in scholarly circles in the country is at best a moot point; conversely, possible knowledge in Old Norse culture of Irish stories relating to a 'land of women', which is sometimes presented in the literature as lying far out in the western ocean, may have a bearing on the origins of the conception of Ódáinsakr/Glæsisvellir.[93]

5.6 The guardian, the river and the bridge

The second occurrence of Guthmundus's realm refers to him by name and introduces him as the guardian of those who visit there. He informs them that the golden bridge in the country which divides the world of men from the world of monsters cannot be crossed by humans, just as in the *Navigatio Brendani* (§§1, 28) there is a river dividing the Promised Land of the Saints which the voyagers are not permitted to cross.[94] Guthmundus's secular realm is equivalent to Brendan's holy land. Geruthus lives on the monsters' side of the river, and since Thorkillus and Gorm wish to visit him, Guthmundus ferries them across. Guthmundus performs a similar function to the Otherworld ferryman Charon in Greek tradition who transports voyagers to Hades, Barinthus in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*, and the guardian angel in *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla* and other visionary texts discussed below. His function is also mirrored by the youth in the Promised Land of the Saints in the Brendan voyage tale who welcomes Brendan and his crew and calls each of them by name. Although knowledge by Otherworld people of the names of humans seems to be a known conceit in this genre of story, it may not be without significance in the present context that Guthmundus also calls each of Thorkillus's companions by name, just as his daughter calls Helgi by name in *Helga þáttr*. The giant Skrýmir in 'Þórr's journey to Útgarða-Loki' also calls Þórr by name when the latter exits what he took to be an uninhabited house but was in fact the giant's glove. In the Irish tale of Teach Cuanna referred to earlier, the man of the house also greets Fionn by name.[95]

5.7 The pierced Geruthus and chained Utgarthilocus

The description of Geruthus with a perforated body, sitting facing the shattered section of a cliff, with three women on iron seats nearby who have tumours all over

93 See discussion of Hvítramannaland below.

94 On the bridge motif in general, see further Patch 1950, p. 374; Dinzelbacher 1973; Egeler 2015, p. 57.

95 Power 1985, p. 247. Tolley (2012, p. 89) states that this indicates that narratives structurally parallel with the two sections of the second part of Thor's Journey "were already joined in Irish tradition, and may hence have been borrowed in such a union in Scandinavia".

their bodies and no strength in their backbones, draws on sources such as *Þórsdrápa* and Snorri's extended version of the story in *Skáldskaparmál*. Thorkillus explains to his men that Þórr had been provoked by the insolence of the giants to pierce the vitals of Geruthus with a burning ingot, which had gone through him and smashed the sides of a mountain, and that the women had been struck by his thunderbolts and had their bodies broken. Utgarthilocus, chained in a cave infested with snakes, calls to mind Loki, who, on account of his part in the death of Baldr and his taunting of the gods, was caught by Þórr and bound in a cave over the edges of three flat stones with the entrails of one of his sons;[96] the entrails became bands of iron (*Gylfaginning*, ch. 49).

Both the description of Geruthus and that of Utgarthilocus have probably also drawn on the story of the myth of Prometheus; King Eurystheus required Hercules to bring him the apples of the Garden of the Hesperides which belonged to Zeus and were located somewhere at the edge of the northern world. The garden was guarded by Ladon, a hundred-headed dragon, and by the Hesperides themselves, nymphs who were the daughters of Atlas. Hercules travelled far in his search for the garden, combating and wrestling various challengers before coming upon Prometheus. As punishment for stealing the secret of fire from the gods and giving it to mankind, Prometheus, on the instructions of Zeus, had been chained and bound to a mountain cliff in the Caucasus and a shaft driven through his chest. A monstrous eagle alighted daily and ate his liver, which regenerated itself by night only to be eaten again the next day. This continued for 30 years until Hercules killed the eagle and released him. In thanks, Prometheus told him how to get the apples, which he succeeded in doing.

It is possibly not coincidental that the two episodes (Garden of Apples and Bound Titan) follow one another in the two traditions: in Saxo's tale the description of Guthmundus's realm and the Garden is followed by the episode of the chained Geruthus in his cave, and the Garden of the Hesperides is linked with the chained Prometheus in the Greek tradition, the latter preceding the former in this instance.[97] There are also the chained Greek heroes in the Cerberus episode.

There is no evidence to suggest influence of Irish voyage and adventure tales on either this episode in the Torkillus voyages or the next one on monstrous guard dogs and snakes.

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96 In the late post-medieval story *Sagan af Gorm kónginum gamla*, known from a seventeenth-century manuscript and based mostly on a printed version of Saxo's tale, the voyagers come across an old man pierced with an iron rod whom they take to be Loki; see Power 1984a, p. 243.

97 See Apollodorus: *The Library* 2.5.1 ff.; Hyginus: *Fabulae* 30. Davidson / Fisher ([transl.] 1979–1980, II, p. 147, n. 168) suggest that the idea of the bound Loki may have been influenced by stories of the bound giant of the Caucasus, which could have been brought back to Scandinavia by Vikings who travelled and fought in this area. While this cannot be ruled out, it is more likely in my view to be ultimately based on a literary reference from classical literature which entered both the written and oral traditions.

5.8 Monstrous guard dogs

The dogs of great ferocity seen guarding the entrance to Geruthus's dwelling, and the snakes swirling around, are reminiscent of the Cerberus story in Hercules's final labour, and of hellhounds in the Indo-European tradition generally, including the Irish tradition.[98] Cerberus, the hellhound and guardian of the entrance to Hades, prevented the dead from escaping and the living from entering; it was a three-headed monster hound with a serpent's tail, a mane of snakes and lion's claws. Hercules was charged with capturing Cerberus and bringing it to King Eurystheus. Before he embarked on his Underworld journey, Hercules was first instructed in the Eleusinian mysteries to gain knowledge of how to enter and exit the Underworld without being killed. To enter, he was ferried over the river by Charon, the ferryman, just as Thorkillus and the voyagers were ferried across the river by Guthmundus. Then he engaged in a wrestling contest before he found his former companions Theseus and Pirithous, who had been imprisoned by Hades for trying to kidnap Persephone from the Underworld. Hades had feigned hospitality and prepared a feast for the two heroes. He offered them chairs, which were chairs of forgetfulness, to which he chained them, with snakes coiling around them, ensnaring them permanently. In a similar vein, we have seen that Guthmundus offered Thorkillus and his companions food and drink which, if they partook of, they would loose their memories and never leave the place; and they were encompassed by snakes, as noted above, as they exited the cave of Geruthus. Hercules managed to save Theseus and succeeded in overpowering Cerberus, throwing him over his shoulder and taking him out of the Underworld and up to King Eurystheus.

6 The Christian elements

There is a clear Christian focus in the *fornaldarsögur* under investigation and in Saxo's voyages of Thorkillus to Utgarthilocus. The main didactic point of the stories is to portray Christianity as being superior to heathendom and to emphasise the importance of baptism and conversion. This is more prominent in some tales than in others. In *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns*, it is restricted for the most part to single individuals rather than to entire communities. Goðmundr agrees not to interfere with Þorsteinn practising his own religion, which perhaps suggests that the kingdom of Grundir in the Otherworld, of which Þorsteinn and Goðrún become rulers, will also follow the Christian faith. This is not, however, stated in the text. It is notable also that Earl Agði, who dies and becomes a *draugr*, eventually settles in his grave mound, never to return

98 See Lincoln 1991; also the reference to the enormous dogs in Adam of Bremen's account of the precipitous island of the Cyclopes and Hyginus's *Fabulae* 125.

again, due to the fact that Þorsteinn places a cross at the entrance of the mound. The blessing and luck of King Óláfr (his *hamingja*) is also invoked on various occasions when the hero is in difficulty, but this is not necessarily associated with Christianity, as it occurs in many other tales. On the other hand, although the Christian King Óláfr gets the best of the heathen Goðmundr, Goðmundr's kingdom continues to exist with its own cultural norms and is not converted to the new religion. Moreover, many of the detailed motifs, such as the Underworld, the dwarfs, the magic gifts, the horns and the Otherworld contests, are not Christian in either origin or spirit and are essentially traditional elements which have been used by the author to create an entertaining story about a man who leaves the Norwegian court and successfully wins a new domain. In *Helga þáttr*, on the other hand, the chief denizen of the Otherworld, Guðmundr, has been transformed into a kind of wicked wizard who espouses paganism and opposes the true Christian faith as represented by good King Óláfr. The heroes of *Yngvars saga víðfǫrla*, Yngvarr and his son Sveinn, are unashamedly Christian, and conversion of pagan domains is one of the principal items on their agenda.

As we have seen, many of the Irish *echtrai* and *Immram Brain* are similarly constructed with traditional matter but also contain important elements which reflect on the Christian conversion: in *Echtrae Connlai* and *Immram Brain*, for example, the Otherworld women are representatives of Christianity who urge the respective heroes to exchange their previous pagan existence for a new world without sadness, disease or death. On disembarking from his boat and putting his foot on the soil of Ireland, Nechtan mac Collbrain in *Immram Brain* seeks to return unsuccessfully to his previous life: raising his hand against age is an act of folly since no-one has yet baptised him by casting a wave of holy water over him and he turns immediately to ashes.[99] This implies that to gain everlasting life one must be baptised.

The transparency of the Christian message in the Bran tale led James Carney (1955, p. 258) to the conclusion that it is an allegory showing man setting out on the voyage to Paradise. In similar vein, Mats Malm (1992) has argued that the voyage of Thorkillus in *Gesta Danorum* is to be understood as an allegory. While descriptions of the hellish Underworld with all its fearsome spectres and filthy associations find analogues in the Old Norse literature of grave mounds and in the accounts of the Underworld in the *Aeneid* and the *Odyssey*, nothing comes close, according to Malm, to the similarity with the descriptions in Christian visionary literary texts, such as *Visio Tnugdali* and *Visio Turchilli*. Furthermore, the visit of Aeneas in the *Aeneid* to the world of the dead, in which his father foretells the fate of Rome, may have served as a model for Saxo to predict the momentous coming of Christianity to Denmark. Malm takes it that Saxo would have known Fulgentius's interpretation of the *Aeneid*, Aeneas's journey through life culminating in reaching maturity and the highest wisdom

99 Mac Mathúna (ed.) 1985, pp. 45, 58.

in the Underworld.[100] He also takes it that Saxo was aware of the commentary of Bernardus Silvestris on the *Aeneid*, the *Descensus ad inferos*, whereby the soul must go down to the Underworld in order to cleanse itself of the evil of the body.[101] Hence the virtues are tested, as in Saxo's narrative when the men are warned against gluttony, carnal desires and theft, the hero eventually emerging from darkness into the light.[102] This interpretation of the Thorkillus voyages in *Gesta Danorum* is similar to that offered in this paper of the *Navigatio* and the Irish *immrama*. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that, while the Christian allegorical reading of the tales is of fundamental importance, the wondrous adventures and diverse traditional elements, which belong to a long stream of tales and myths that express universal human longing for a happy life, should not be under-estimated.[103]

6.1 *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla*

In *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla*, the Christian message of baptism and conversion is also emphasised,[104] together with the more or less complete assimilation of the Old Norse-Icelandic Ódáinsakr to the Christian Earthly Paradise. In this tale, the main character, Eiríkr, a king's son from Þrándheimr, goes on a voyage with twelve companions in search of Ódáinsakr. They come to Constantinople, where Eiríkr is converted to Christianity when the king explains Christian theology and cosmology to him. They then continue on their quest and eventually reach their destination, which is located not in the far north, but in the south, east of India. According to the text, pagans call it *Ódáinsakr*, Christian men, *jǫrð lifandi manna* or *Paradísum*. Although the latter two are identical at the beginning of the text, Heaven (*himinn*), where the angels and God dwell, is distinguished from them later when it is said to be reserved for the souls of the righteous and that no-one may enter it while still alive. By the time of the composition of *Eiríks saga*, the descriptions of the Earthly Paradise or the Garden of Eden,

100 Fulgentius (see Helm [ed.] 1898).

101 Bernardus Silvestris (Jones / Jones [eds.] 1977).

102 Plato's theory of forms is also relevant to an understanding of the nature of knowledge and truth as presented in the voyages of Thorkillus, especially the allegory of the sun (*Republic* 508b–509c), the allegory of the divided line (*Republic* VI: 509d–513e), and the allegory of the cave (514a–520d).

103 In a series of articles on *Immram Brain*, in which he discussed and analysed a number of traditional sources and elements the author drew upon in producing his composition, Mac Cana (1972; 1975; 1976) took issue with Carney's view and argued that, while the two poems could be treated as allegorical, many of the elements in the poems and the prose were native and traditional and were allowed to find their own level in such a way that the allegorical interpretation could not be sustained for the work in its entirety.

104 See most recently on this tale the discussion in Egeler 2015, pp. 41–59.

Paradise and Heaven had become almost indistinguishable, which partly accounts for the contradiction in our text.[105]

According to influential Churchmen such as Isidore of Seville, the Earthly Paradise was located in the east, and is a *hortus deliciarum* 'Garden of Delights' (*Etymologiae* (14.iii:2–4).[106] This account, in conjunction with his description of the Fortunate Isles (*Etymologiae* 14.vi:2.8), which follows close on the heels of the description of the island of Ireland, was very influential, not only on Irish voyage literature but also on that of Old Norse. Like the islands of the *immrama*, the Fortunate Islands are located by Isidore in the west where the sun sets. He refers to their blessed and happy nature, producing all good things of themselves, including fruit trees and ridges of hills covered in grapevines.[107]

The descriptions of the *terra reprommissionis sanctorum* in the *Navigatio* (§28), and the Otherworld islands in the *immrama*, share other features with Isidore's descriptions and with accounts from Classical literature (Homer, Hesiod, Pindar etc.), as they also do with *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla* and texts concerning Winland/Vínland ('Wineland'). With regard to the latter, the earliest account by Adam of Bremen in *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (IV.39), states that King Svend of Denmark (1047–1076) spoke about an island in the ocean which is located further away (than Greenland) and that had been found by many; it is called *Winland* because wild grapes grow there of themselves, which make excellent wine. We have learned, Adam says, not from unfounded rumour but from the trustworthy testimony of Danes, that crops abound there without having to be planted; beyond the island there is nothing habitable in yonder ocean but only intolerable ice and boundless fog.[108] In *Eiríks saga rauða*, Leifr Eiríksson lost his way on his missionary journey to Greenland and came upon a land

105 See also Power 1985, p. 159; Egeler 2015, pp. 45–46.

106 See Lindsay (ed.) 1911.

107 The influence of Christian descriptions, such as these by Isidore, on the conception in Irish tradition of distant islands in the west can be seen, for example, in *Immram Brain* (§25), where many islands also lie in the *oceon* (*in Oceano*: Isidore) to the west, *oceon* being a loanword from Latin in Early Irish: *Fil trí coícta inse cían/isind 'oceon' frinn aníar* ('There are thrice fifty islands far away in the *oceon* to the west of us'). For other Christian features, such as the island on a pedestal or on four feet, see Mac Mathúna 1994, pp. 346–347. Whilst the Promised Land is located in the west in the *Navigatio Brendani*, the voyagers must travel eastwards to it from the Paradise of Birds, which seems to indicate that the author is giving nodding acquaintance to the well-known Isidorean tradition of the Earthly Paradise being located in the east.

108 *Preterea unam adhuc insulam recitavit a multis in eo repertam oceano, quae dicitur Winland, eo quod ibi vites sponte nascantur, vinum optimum ferentes. Nam et fruges ibi non seminatas habundare non fabulosa opinione, sed certa comperimus relatione Danorum. Post quam insulam, ait, terra non invenitur habitabilis in illo oceano, sed omnia, quae ultra sunt, glacie intolerabili ac caligine immense plena sunt.* This description is linked by Adam with King Haraldr Harðráði of Norway's attempt to discover the far northern extremities of the earth and his lucky escape from the abyss. See notes 66 and 69 above.

in which self-sown fields of wheat and vines were growing. Þorfinnr Karsefni later found a similar land fitting Leifr's description.[109]

The island to which Barinthus journeys at the beginning of the *Navigatio* is called *Insula deliciosa* ('The Delightful Island'), the same name, more or less, as Isidore uses for Paradise. One may also compare the names *Inis Subai* ('Island of Delight') and *Mag Mell* ('Pleasant Plain' or 'Plain of Delights') in the *immrama* and *echtrai*. Isidore's description of Paradise and the Fortunate or Blessed Isles has clearly influenced these various accounts, both Irish and Norse.[110] The description in *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla* is too close, as Simek (1983) argues, to be merely accidental: the king tells Eiríkr that around the earth are great seas which are called Oceanus (*Æirekr mællti. huat er vtan vm jordina. konungr s(egir). mikill siorr er Oceanum heitir*.) and that a wall of fire stands before paradise which reaches right up to heaven (*þuiat elldligr ueggr stendr firir sa tekr allt til himini upp*.).[111]

There are a number of parallels between *jǫrð lifandi manna* in *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla* and the descriptions in Irish texts and in visionary literature. As we have seen, the name itself is echoed in *Echtrae Chonnlai* and implied in *Immram Brain* and other Irish texts, and there are similarities with the description of the *terra repromissionis sanctorum* and other islands in *Navigatio Brendani* and *Visio Tnugdali*. The Otherworld woman who invites the hero Connlae to her island home comes from the lands of the living (*a tírib béo*), in which there is neither sadness, transgression nor death, recalling the biblical *terra viventium*.[112] *Terra viventium* refers originally to this present world as opposed to the land of the dead but is used by the Church Fathers and medieval theologians for paradise – the land of the living in which one

109 *Hauksbók* (Finnur Jónsson / Eiríkur Jónsson [eds.] 1892–1896, p. 432, pp. 437 ff.

110 See also Maier 2013, p. 121; Egeler 2015, p. 45–46.

111 Jensen (ed.) 1983, pp. 44, 46. The parallel could be either directly taken from Isidore's *Etymologiae* or have come through sources such as the *Elucidarium* and *De imagine mundi* of Honorius Augustodunensis, which have a number of parallels with the descriptions and motifs in *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla*. See Simek 1984 and the discussion in Egeler 2015, pp. 43–44.

112 The woman tells Connlae (§3): *Do:dechad-sa a tírib béo i-nna bí bás na peccad na immormuss* ('I have come from [the] lands of [the] living in which there is neither death nor sin nor transgression [original sin]'). See Ps. 27.13, 116.9, Vulgate Ps. 51.7, 52.5, 116.9, 142.5, Job 28.13, Isa. 38.11, 53.8 and Ezek. 32.32; Egeler (2015, pp. 45–46) has more references and further discussion. Carey (1999a; 2000, pp. 116–117, n. 20;) and Egeler (2015, pp. 360–364) also draw attention to the description by Giraldus Cambrensis in *Topographia Hibernica* (II.4) of two islands in north Munster, one small and one large, the smaller a *viventium insula*, where the people do not die until they are ferried over to the larger island. Since the small island is inhabited by monks of the *Céili Dé*, who belonged to an ascetic movement of the ninth century whose demise came about in the tenth century, the tradition of the holy islands may go back to the earlier period. The tradition was also transmitted into Norse through the *Konungs skuggsjá* in the thirteenth century (Magnus Már Lárusson [ed./transl.] 1955, p. 44), where the island is called *Loghri* (Lough Ree) and hence not translated from Giraldus Cambrensis's account. An earlier vernacular source which mentions the islands is the text *Do ingantaib Érenn* ('On the wonders of Ireland', Todd 1848, p. 210). See note 47 above.

would see the goodness of the Lord (e.g. *credo videre bona Domini in terra viventium*, Job 21.13, Ps. 27.13). In *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla*, not only do we have a direct correspondence in terminology with *Echtrae Chonnlai* (*jǫrð lifandi/tír inna mbéo*), but heaven is also described in terms consonant with those referred to in the Irish texts, and in this context the term clearly derives from the biblical *terra viventium*.[113] The closest and most sustained description of the paradisal land is that found in *Immram Brain*, perhaps the earliest and in some ways the most interesting and enigmatic of these texts. In *Bran*, the sought-after land is across the sea and is surrounded by a galaxy of similarly exquisite islands. It is called variously *Emain* or *Emn(a)e*, *Tír inna mBan* ('The Land of the Women'), *Aircthech* ('The Silvery Island'), *Arcatnél* ('Silver Cloud Island'), *Ciúin/Imchiúin* ('The Quiet/Very Quiet One'), *Mag Mell* ('The Pleasant Plain'), *Mag Mon* ('The Plain of Sports'). It is a heavenly place, described in the tale in two poems of exquisite beauty. The Otherworld woman in *Immram Brain* extols the beauty of the islands in the sea, of which she says there are one hundred and fifty, each twice or three times the size of Ireland. She says that God made heaven and earth and all the islands, and she invites Bran to voyage to 'The Land of the Women' (*Tír inna mBan*). On his voyage, Bran meets at sea the sea-god Manannán mac Lir who is driving his chariot across what to him is a flowery plain, but to Bran is a wave-tossed open sea. Manannán is on his way to beget the semi-divine hero Mongán mac Fiachnai, and there is a clear parallel drawn between Mongán's conception and that of Jesus Christ.

Given the Christian context and message of the story, *Tír inna mBan* would appear to be a bizarre choice of destination; it is clearly based on traditional story patterns, a similar land also occurring in *Immram Curaig Máele Dúin* (Oskamp [ed./transl.] 1970; §28; see pp. 59–60), *Echtrae Chonnlai* (McCone [ed.] 2000), and other tales. Bran eventually reaches his destination, returns to Ireland, tells his story, which is written down in Ogam letters, and then departs, never to be heard of again.

This tale, *Echtrae Chonnlai*, and other texts use the negative formula to extol the praises of the Otherworld, the formula being typically employed in accounts of the paradisal land, both Christian and pagan.[114] It is a land of immortality insofar as there is no decay nor death there. The woman in *Immram Brain* (§10) describes her land as being:

> Cen brón, cen dubae, cen bás,
> cen nach galar, cen indgás
>
> (Without sorrow, without sadness, without death,
> without any disease, without wounding)

113 See also Power 1985b, pp. 851, 857; Maier 2005, p. 168; Maier 2013, p. 120; Egeler 2015, pp. 45–46.
114 See Patch 1950, p. 12 and *passim*.

These are the same features ascribed to *Ódáinsakr* and *Glæsisvellir* in *Hervarar saga*, written a little later than AD 1300, which states that people did not die there and that, after his death, they treated their powerful and wise king, Guðmundr, as their god:

> Suo finst ritad i fornum bokum, ad Jotunheimar voru kalladir nordur vmm Gandvik [...] Gudmundur hiet hofdingi i Jotunheimum, bær hans hiet a Grund enn hieradid Glæsiswellir. Hann var rikur madur og witur, og vard suo gamall og allir hans menn, ad þeir lifdu marga mannzalldra. Þui trudu heidnir menn, ad i hans riki mundi Odaens akur, sa stadur, er aff huorium manni, er þar kiemur, huerfur sott og elli, og ma eingi deya. Eptter dauda Godmundar blotudu menn hann og kolludu hann gott sitt.[115]
>
> (Thus it is found written in old books that north of the White Sea were regions called Giantland. [...] Guðmundr was the name of a chieftain in Giantland, his farm was called Grund, and the region, Glæsisvellir. He was a rich and wise man, and he and all his men reached such a high age that they lived for many human life-spans. Therefore the pagans believed the Ódáinsakr to lie in his dominion, that place where neither disease nor old age fall off from every man who comes there, and where nobody can die. After his death, people made offerings to him and called him their god.)

And the author of *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla* says of heaven:

> Þar er eigi sótt né þytr, eigi dauði, eigi hryggleikr ok eigi vesǫld. Þar er jafnan fagnaðr ok eilíf sæla ok gleði með himneskum krásum án enda.
>
> (There's neither sickness nor weeping there, nor death, no sadness and no grief. There is always joy and everlasting bliss and gladness and heavenly pleasures without end.)

The account of the Otherworld in *Hervarar saga* is earlier than that in *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla*, *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns*, *Helga þáttr*, *Yngvars saga víðfǫrla* and the other Norse *fornaldarsögur* of journeys to the far north. Significantly, the author implies that the land and people described in his story are not based on the stirrings of his own imagination – in the same vein as Adam of Bremen states that he has not learned about Winland from unfounded rumour – but rather that they are based on the testimony of old books which place the location of Guðmundr's realm in the regions of Giantland called Glæsisvellir, within which pagans believed Ódáinsakr to lie. The passage given above from the saga lacks Saxo's censure of Guthmundus; nor does it have the Christian slant of many of the later accounts.

It is clear that the description in *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla* owes much to Christian accounts. In this tale, Eiríkr must pass through a dark forest and enter the mouth of a dragon guarding a stone bridge that spans the River Phison. This dark land of the forest (and the smoke from the dragon) prior to entry into the Land of the Living is akin to the fog surrounding the Earthly Paradise in *Navigatio Brendani* and other texts; the land is broad and flat, with streams of honey and tall trees in *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla*, wide and full of trees bearing fruit in the *Navigatio*; in both texts there is a

115 Jón Helgason (ed.) 1924, p. 89.

single river, as in Rev. 22.1. In Gen. 2.10–14, on the other hand, the river is said to have flowed out of Eden to water the garden but then separated into four main branches. Nor is there mention in either text of the Tree of Life (Gen. 3.22) or the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen. 2.17), or of the first man (see Gen. 2.8) and the Fall, culminating in the expulsion from Paradise and the setting of an angel as guard on the gates (Gen. 2.21–3.24).[116] The consequence of these actions was that no human entered Paradise after the departure of Adam and Eve until Christ brought to it the soul of the repentant malefactor who was crucified alongside him (see Lk. 23.42–43 and the discussion of *Echtrae Nera* above). Guthmundus is in some ways akin to the angelic guard in Genesis, whose function the handsome young guardian angel/man in *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla* also performs and on whom the mysterious youth (*Navigatio*) is probably based. As we have seen, all three call the voyagers by their name.

Both texts mention the great brightness or whiteness and temperate weather, stock features of the Otherworld;[117] a tower similar to a column floating in the sky, with a ladder at its side, occurs in *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla*, and there is an island with a very high rocky cliff like a wall in the *Navigatio*, in both of which the voyagers find a room or hall with a table full of all kinds of wonderful food, drink and treats, gold and other precious things. *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla* relates all of this in the form of a dream-vision of heaven.[118] Both *Eiríks saga* and the *Navigatio* also have a prediction by the youth about the death of the hero: in *Eiríks saga*, Eiríks spirit will be transported to the Earthly Paradise and his bones to the place where they are to await

116 David Ashurst's 2006 survey of texts such as *Veraldar saga*, the Old Norse *Elucidarius*, *Stjórn*, *Leiðarvisir*, and the *Dialogues* of Saint Gregory the Great has clarified a number of issues regarding the Old Norse tradition on this subject, such as the distinction between the earthly and heavenly Paradises, the location of Paradise relative to the earth, and the perilous bridge. It is not clear that the use of the latter motif in *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla* is indebted to Gregory's *Dialogi*, see Egeler 2015, p. 57 (n. 202).

117 This is also true of the other Irish voyage tales, particularly of *Immram Brain* which places emphasis on the great brightness and whiteness of the Otherworld realm. The woman bears a branch from the apple-tree of Emain, which has twigs of white silver on it (§3: *gésci findarcait forra* [v.l. *fuirre*]), and speaks of her island as being located to the south of White Silver and Silver Cloud (§§5, 8: *isin mag des Findarcat*; *isin maig des Arcatnéul*), in which a white/fair man (the sun) illumines the plains (§16: *fer find for-osndi réde*); the island is supported by four feet of white silver (§6: *cossa findruine foë*); there is a white stream of silver and stairs of gold (§40: *find[s]ruth aircit / drep(p)a óir*). The word *find* ('white') occurs with great frequency in the tale.

118 See also *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* (Ólafur Halldórsson [ed.] 1958, ch. 76, pp. 152–153) and Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (Finnur Jónsson [ed.] 1932, ch. 13, pp. 39 ff.), in which Óláfr is led up a great staircase to a place of bright blooms and people in shining white clothes, where he speaks to God. Such visionary literature also influenced the dream of the well-furnished hall in chapter 30 of *Gísla saga Súrssonar*. See Cochrane (2004, pp. 180 ff.), who remarks on the suggestion of sexuality in this passage of *Gísla saga*: the dream-woman invites Gísli to go home with her, which reminds Cochrane of the role of pagan female spirits (*dísir*) inviting the slain to accompany them. The woman also says to Gísli that they should relax, and in one redaction of the tale (S), she says that Gísli will rule over the wealth together with her (Cochrane 2004, p. 180).

As was true of the Saxo voyages of Thorkillus, there are also parallels with *Visio Tnugdali*, which was remarkably popular throughout Europe in the medieval period and was translated into Old Norse in the thirteenth century under the title *Duggals leiðsla* (Cahill [ed./transl.] 1983). The story tells of an Irish nobleman who in 1149 had a three-day dream during which he was shown heaven and hell by an angel. Tnugdal's vision has a didactic function: when the nobleman awakes, he gives away his possessions and is determined to live a more virtuous life. A comparison between some of the motifs in the *Visio*/*Duggals leiðsla* with *Eiríks saga víðfǫrla*, such as the tower without pillars floating in the air, suggests that the author of *Eiríks saga* used *Duggals leiðsla* in his composition.[119]

The *Visio Tnugdali* is clearly dependent not only on the *Visio Pauli* but also stands in a very close relationship with another famous Irish visionary text, *Fís Adamnáin* ('The Vision of Adamnán'), which draws heavily on *Visio Pauli*.[120] It is difficult to say if the author of *Eiríks saga* knew the written text of the *Navigatio*, as both texts include many of the same stock features of Paradise and the Otherworld. The *Navigatio* seems to stand in a more distant relationship to it than *Visio Tnugdali*. On the other hand, the similarities we have noted above are so close in places that they make it possible the author of *Eiríks saga* may have known floating oral or written versions of certain episodes or features of the Brendan story, especially the description of Brendan's Island of the Promised Land, which he combined with elements of Old Norse sources about Ódáinsakr.

6.2 Hvítramannaland

There are undoubted Gaelic connections and parallels in the whole Vínland and Greenland complex of stories which we cannot examine fully in the present work. Some of the items mentioned in this regard include: the Hebridean or Irish background of many of the central characters, the frequent mention of ships being blown off course and landing in Ireland before sailing back to Greenland or Iceland, motifs such as the runners Haki and Hækja, Freydis bearing her breasts, *Furðustrandir*

119 Simek (1984, pp. 112 ff.) argued that the author of *Eiríks saga* used a Latin version of the *Visio*, but see Egeler 2015, p. 55 (and n. 198).

120 The *Navigatio* was influenced by the visionary text *Visio Pauli*, which was translated into many European languages, including Old Norse, possibly before or around 1200. It is preserved fragmentarily in AM 681 c 4to (*c*. 1400) and AM 624 4to (*c*. 1500). It is quite possible that our author would have been aware of this text in either Latin or the translation and probably used it to suit his own purpose. See Mac Mathúna 2007, pp. 112–113.

('Shores of Wonder' / *Tír Ingnad*, 'Land of Wonders', in Irish), and the abundance of grapes and self-sown crops.[121]

Very close parallels to the Irish material are found in the accounts of Hvítramannaland, which was said to be in the neighbourhood of Vínland. This is the earliest Old Norse vernacular description of the Vínland area, and according to the account some people called Hvítramannaland by the name Írland et mikla ('Greater Ireland'). In *Landnámabók*, it is reported that Ari Másson of Reykhólar, who according to *Kristni saga* was a leading chieftain in Iceland in 981 when Bishop Fríðrekr began his missionary activity in the country, was driven off course to Hvítramannaland ('White Men's Land') or Írland et mikla ('Greater Ireland').[122]

According to *Landnámabók* the first person to tell this piece of oral history was the sea-trader Hrafn, who had spent time in Limerick in Ireland. Hrafn appears to have heard the story in Ireland, and he would probably have been aware of Irish stories of voyages by Irish monks and seafarers to secluded islands in the ocean. This, together with the fact that the land is called 'Greater Ireland', seems to testify to the Irish provenance of some of the detail contained in it.[123] Thorkel Gellison, the great grandson of Ari Másson, reported that Icelanders had heard from Earl Þorfinn on the Orkney Islands that Ari had been recognized in Hvítramannaland but could not sail away. Significantly in this regard, Hvítramannaland was a Christian country in which Ari was baptised and held in high regard.[124]

Various scholars have remarked on the parallels between Ari Másson's experience and elements in the *Navigatio* and the Irish *immrama*.[125] Most recently, Matthias Egeler (2018, pp. 250–258) has argued that the parallels between the Hvítramannaland-story and Irish voyage tales are so close that they are only explicable in terms of wholesale borrowing into Icelandic from the Irish narrative tradition.[126]

Wilhelm Heizmann (1998, pp. 72 ff., 96) drew attention to a note in *Landnámabók* about a land dispute during the period of settlement in the remote Hvanndalur valley, which is located on a peninsula of northern Iceland jutting out into the ocean, that led to the killing of 16 men.[127] Since this valley was difficult to access and had little to

121 See, for example, Nansen 1911; Gísli Sigurðsson 1988; Hermann Pálsson 1996; Almqvist 1997; Mac Mathúna 1999.

122 Jakob Benediktsson (ed.) 1968, p. 162. See also *Kristni saga*, ch. 1 (Sigurgeir Steingrímsson / Ólafur Halldórsson / Foote [eds.] 2003); Hermann Pálsson 2000, pp. 36 ff.

123 Egeler (2015, pp. 506–507) notes the reference in *Immram Brain* (§25) to the many islands in the ocean to the west, each of them twice or thrice the size of Ireland.

124 Ari Másson's adventure appears to be related to a similar story in *Eyrbyggja saga*. See Einar Ól. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson (eds.) 1935, p. 234; Mac Mathúna 1999, p. 184–185.

125 On Hvítramannaland and Irland et mikla, see, for example, Nansen 1911, I, pp. 353 ff., II, pp. 42–51; Young 1937; Mac Mathúna 1999, pp. 177–187; Hermann Pálsson 2000; Mundal 2011; Ahronson 2014, ch. 1; Egeler 2015, pp. 506–509, 525–526.

126 See also note 48 above.

127 Jakob Benediktsson (ed.) 1968, S215/H182.

offer economically, Heizmann wonders why it should have led to such bloodshed. He makes the insightful suggestion that part of the valley may have been considered by the people to be the location of Ódáinsakr, the Land of Immortality, an identification which is explicitly attested in the later folklore of the area, thus endowing it with a unique value. Heizmann's suggestion seems well-founded.[128] Egeler is also minded to accept it, developing the idea further into a powerful theory which links the social contexts of the Hvanndalur myth with the Hvítramannaland and Vínland myths about the discovery of paradisal islands out in the ocean off the coast of Hvanndalur.[129]

7 Conclusion

Power (1985a) concluded that while the *fornaldarsögur* and Old Norse-Icelandic tales discussed in this paper do not appear to be derived from foreign secular or religious literature on the common theme of the Otherworld journey in medieval literature, this theme would have been well known to the authors of the sagas and that they have, to varying degrees, been influenced by works of this kind.[130]

The conclusion is valid to the extent that the tales are based on documented story patterns in which indigenous heroes play a central role and probably had a history in the pre-conversion period. Recent research indicates, however, that Classical and Christian literature, especially Christian visionary literature, has exercised a strong influence on some of the tales in question, suggesting that the external models have also been partly borrowed and adapted by the authors. Power suggests that religious texts such as *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* may have reinforced the use of the Otherworld theme in the Old Norse-Icelandic tales, but that the closest analogues are Irish secular tales discussed above which have both similar themes and similar descriptions.[131]

The distinction she draws between so-called Irish secular tales and religious works, such as *Navigatio Brendani*, is a little shaky in that all these texts were composed by Christian authors in monasteries, and most of them display Christian sentiments and draw on Christian literature. She appears to include both the *immrama* and the *echtrai* amongst the secular tales. The former are unquestionably Christian in purpose and belong to the same category of tale as the *Navigatio*; while they have

128 See also discussion on *Hadingus and Nera* above and also note 31.

129 Egeler (2015, pp. 513 ff.) also draws attention to the localisation of the Otherworld in a holy mountain on the coast of Snæfellsness peninsula, Helgafell, to which, according to *Eyrbyggja saga* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson / Matthías Þórðarson [eds.] 1935, p. 9) and *Landnámabók* (Jakob Benediktsson [ed.] 1968, p. 125), Þórólfr Mostrarskegg and his people would go after their death. Egeler compares *Tech nDuinn* and *Emain* (discussed above), both of which also function as physical localisations of the Otherworld in the Irish landscape/seascape.

130 Power 1985a, p. 156.

131 Power 1985a, p. 167.

secular heroes and avail of traditional pre-Christian motifs, these motifs are sometimes only remotely connected with their pagan background in terms of the overall intent of the tales: they have been included by the authors either to entertain and have no substantive edificatory purpose, or/and to transmit Christian teaching. The *immrama* are essentially concerned with penance and salvation, reflecting the socio-religious milieu from which they stem, and are unlike the *fornaldarsögur* in this regard, which have a different cultural-historical context and ambience. It is true that conversion and salvation play an important role in some of the Old Norse-Icelandic tales also, but they are not explicitly penitential; the same applies to a certain degree to some of the *echtrai*.

For the Irish side of her comparison, Power uses primarily the *echtrai* (including *Serglige Con Culainn*), not the *immrama*. This is legitimate for the reasons just given and also, to some extent, because the structure of the *immrama* involves rowing about from island to island, while the *echtrai* focus more on the initial situation and on what takes place in the Otherworld after the destination has been reached. Hence, the main sites of activity are perhaps more limited in the latter. The *fornaldarsögur* under investigation are possibly a little closer in structure to the *echtrai* in their folkloric-type narrative pattern discussed earlier. Many of them, however, have, like the *immrama*, multiple sites with serial adventures, in the form of inset tales and stops on the journey, which open up narrative possibilities for authors to relate minor tales and comment on the progression of the voyage and its effects on the voyagers. This is also true of *Immram Máele Dúin* and *Immram Ua Chorra* whose main focus, following the preliminaries, is on the voyage, adventures and fantastic things witnessed at sea and on the various islands. The prosimetrum form of the Bran voyage, the Adventure of Connlae, and *Serglige Con Culainn* allows for more descriptive flourishes. Overall, however, it is the voyage and visionary texts, composed in both the vernacular and Hiberno-Latin, and later *echtrai* composed in the period of romantic and chivalric literature, such as *Echtra Airt meic Cuind* ('The Adventure of Art son of Conn') or the earlier *Tochmarc Emere* ('The Wooing Emer'), which often provide the closest detailed analogues to the *fornaldarsögur*, including *Hjálmþérs saga*, *Hálfdanar saga*, etc., and the voyages of Thorkillus in Saxo's Danish History.

The tentative result of this investigation is that both the authors of the *fornaldarsögur* under review here and Saxo Grammaticus in the Thorkillus voyages used story patterns and motifs akin to those found in Hiberno-Latin and vernacular Irish voyage, adventure and visionary literature, along with a wide range of other materials, some probably taken from compendia of learned lore.[132] Whilst Old Norse-Icelandic authors may have been aware of early Irish vernacular narratives of paradisal islands in the western ocean and borrowed – probably in oral mode – some motifs and story patterns from these sources, it is difficult to pin down instances of direct influence

132 See Stephen A. Mitchell 1993, p. 207.

other than some of those discussed above which may have come *via* knowledge of *Navigatio Brendani* and Hiberno-Latin visionary literature. On the other hand, the conception of the paradisal island located in the western ocean, as exemplified in the narratives dealing with Hvítramannaland and Vínland, is almost certainly indebted to Irish and Hiberno-Latin sources, especially *peregrinatio*-type ones. It is difficult to prove that the Irish material gave rise to the original story pattern of the Otherworld voyage in Old-Norse Icelandic tales, but it likely that it gave some impetus to the theme.[133] Indeed Egeler has argued powerfully that the Irish influence should be extended to the *Ódáinsakr* and *Glæsisvellir* conception, including features, such as those in *Hervarar saga* and other sources, of immortality and beautiful women.

Overall, the parallels between the *fornaldarsögur* tales examined here and the vernacular *immrama/echtrai* are not sufficiently persuasive in my view to prove that the former have borrowed extensively and directly from the latter, but rather that these parallels have mostly come about through similar elements relating to fantastic voyages and paradisal lands being found in different cultures and through sharing in a common tradition of Latin Christian and Classical learning, including Hiberno-Latin voyage tales such as the *Navigatio Brendani*,[134] the Matter of Britain and the romantic/chivalric Matière de France/Bretagne,[135] and accounts of Norse travellers and sea-farers who had contacts with Ireland and Britain and which may have contributed to the reinforcement of the story patterns.[136]

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133 Medieval Irish narratives and poems concerning paradisal Otherworld islands, such as some of those regarding *Emain/Emn(a)e*, which is identified in some sources with the Isle of Man and in others with the island of Arran in the Firth of Clyde and Inchcolm in the opposite Firth of Forth (*Insula Emonia/Eumonia*), do not appear to all stem originally from Classical and ecclesiastical sources but to have been part of the native Irish tradition both before and after the arrival and impact of Christianity; both types of Irish narrative (that is, types both with and without classical/ecclesiastical elements) may have been transmitted orally to Iceland by the Norse/Norse-Gaelic settlers from Ireland and Scotland.

134 Compare Heizmann's (1998, pp. 95 ff.) conclusions on the different elements which go to make up the tradition concerning mythical regions of immortality, such as *Ódáinsakr*, and how a selection or combination of these (islands, glass/crystal/amber, apples, beautiful women, immortality) are found in different cultures.

135 Carey (2007) argues that a number of Irish texts, including *Immram Brain* and *Echtrae Chonnlai*, which were probably contained in a now lost Early Irish manuscript called *Cín Dromma Snechtai*, dating possibly to the eighth century, were transmitted to Wales in the ninth century, where they influenced the composition of the Four Branches of the *Mabinogi* and also the text *Preiddeu Annwfn*. From Wales they were transmitted to France and were the inspiration for the production of the Grail legend. Although early Irish sources probably inspired Arthurian literature indirectly, it should be noted that the manner in which the apple is used in Irish sources as a device to lure heroes to the Otherworld is not found in the *Vita Merlini* and other texts, where Avallon is simply the name of the island. On these matters, see Egeler 2015, pp. 458–459; Egeler 2019, n. 4, and note 84 above.

136 I am very grateful to to Professor Wilhelm Heizmann, Dr Clive Tolley and Dr Matthias Egeler for reading my paper and making a number of suggestions for improvement. I thank them in particular for checking the Old Norse material and steering me clear of more errors than would otherwise have been the case. I also thank Sophie Fendel for her excellent editorial work. For remaining shortcomings, I am

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Abbreviations

eDIL	Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language. Based on Royal Irish Academy's Dictionary of the Irish Language based mainly on Old and Middle Irish Materials (1913–1976). www.dil.ie
PL	*Patrologia Latina*
ST	see Thompson, Stith
TBC	*Táin Bó Cúailnge*
VSH	*Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* (see Vita Brendani)

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alone responsible. Dr Egeler's 2015 monumental study *Avalon 66° Nord* was published after early drafts of the present paper were written, and I have therefore been unable to do it the justice it deserves beyond some references in the footnotes: it is the most comprehensive and detailed study of the question under discussion which has hitherto been attempted. I must also thank Dr Egeler for forwarding me a pre-publication copy of his paper on Iceland and the Land of Women (Egeler 2019).

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